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6

THE RETURN OF VIETNAM TO THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

By Gérard Hervouet

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by Gérard Hervouet

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360 Albert Street, Suite 900
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K1R 7X7

Map by:
Stephen Priestley

Translation by:
Mary Taylor

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ACRONYMS

ANS	Sihanoukist Nationalist Army (*Armée nationale sihanoukiste*)
ASEAN	Association of South East Asian Nations
CGDK	Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea
Comecon	Council of Mutual Economic Assistance
GRUNK	Revolutionary Government of the National Union of Kampuchea (*Gouvernement révolutionnaire d'union nationale du Kampuchéa*)
ICCS	International Commission for Control and Supervision
KPNLF	Khmer People's National Liberation Front
PRK	People's Republic of Kampuchea

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 1945, Indochina has suffered the extremely violent effects of the changes which have taken place in the international system. Situated where a variety of strategic, political and economic interests converge, it has become the scene of bitter rivalries which result from a tangled web of revolutionary ideologies and secular animosities.

While this study is intended to be confined to Vietnam and the international consequences of the latter's intervention in Kampuchea in 1978, it will seek to provide an account of what lies behind the policies pursued by those involved in this regional conflict and the complex way in which they have developed.

From the outset these issues will be dealt with from a Canadian point of view which should help the reader to understand the dispute better and also, perhaps, to feel more involved in its development.

In addition, the study will enable the reader to grasp the various tentative suggestions which are put forward at the end of this article concerning the attitudes which Canada should adopt in order to help Vietnam return to the international community.

Before tackling that issue, however, one must begin by trying to understand the complicated motivations of all those involved, directly or indirectly, in this dispute.

First, it is important to realize the way in which the two major opposing coalitions have used the Khmers as surrogates to fight their

battles for them. In Cambodia, each side is trapped by a similar strategy, that of carrying on a war of attrition. Each believes that if the war drags on it will reap political advantages and bring about the exhaustion of its adversary. The symmetrical nature of the positions held by the opposing sides has produced a deadlock which has now lasted for nine years.

Secondly this survey also deals with the confrontational relationship between China, Vietnam and the Soviet Union. An appreciation of how this Moscow-Beijing-Hanoi triangle operates is necessary for a better understanding of both the cooperation and the antagonism which exists between these three Socialist countries. By studying how these three states behave, from an historical perspective, it is easier to understand to what extent their behaviour is motivated by cool calculations of national interest and how cultural traditions persist. These traditions are apparent in arguments where nationalism clearly takes precedence over Marxism-Leninism.

Finally this study tries to give an account of the various attempts to initiate a dialogue between the opponents. There have been innumerable peace proposals, suggested settlements and compromises. Despite all these attempts at mediation, however, and the diplomatic activity which they have involved, the deadlock persists.

But in the last months of 1987* there seem to have been renewed grounds for hope. Attempts have been resumed, even if sometimes they are merely ritual exercises, to work out scenarios which would be acceptable to all those involved. The on-going dialogue between the various Khmer factions does give reason to hope that a new stage has been reached in the attempts at negotiation. It is possible that because of the generally favourable climate in international affairs the conflict has now reached a stage which may permit new concessions to be made and new compromises to be arrived at. Vietnam, the principal actor in this confrontation, is well aware of this and realizes just how far it can modify its intransigent position without giving too much to China or upsetting its Soviet ally, and without risking the security of the buffer zone it has created in Cambodia.

* This monograph is written in April 1988

INTRODUCTION

The conflicts in Indochina no longer provoke international public opinion. There is an insidious tendency for the situation there to appear banal and for attention to be diverted to other regional conflicts. At the same time, the United States is still so traumatized by its defeat in Vietnam that it neither can nor will attach any further priority to Indochina in its foreign policy.

Since 1978 the complex nature of the dispute, the numerous issues at stake, and the character of the actors involved have combined to produce an intractable situation. Even though it is not long since Southeast Asia was seen as the focal point of international affairs, the international community now appears to believe that the vital points of tension have shifted elsewhere. However, the fact that Kampuchea has been occupied by Vietnamese troops since 1978 and the increased tension along the border between China and Vietnam has made Indochina a microcosm of all the various international antagonisms. These involve animosity between East and West, and between China and the Soviet Union, as well as the many regional antagonisms which result from the area's history and political geography.

From the point of view of a political analyst Indochina has thus become an arena wherein the best intentions, the most carefully considered initiatives and the most rational proposals all come to naught. By studying the successive attempts at mediation, all of which have proved illusory, one can reach a better understanding of the relations between the various forces, the pressures to which they are subject, and the effect of historical antagonisms upon them; above all one can better appreciate how all the parties involved retain their independence and

have, like the protagonists in most regional conflicts, managed to preserve a remarkable degree of political autonomy.

This paper is for the benefit of all those who, over the last ten years, have lost track of a situation which has been made all the more confusing because of the intransigence of the principal actors and the numerous interventions of would-be mediators. It seeks to give a brief account of the essential elements of a conflict which is still going on, and to illustrate some of its less apparent aspects in a way which will enable the reader to ask more pertinent questions about Canadian policy *vis-à-vis* Vietnam and Kampuchea. Although Canada is only marginally involved in this conflict, it has not remained indifferent to the confrontations which have brought more than 100,000 Indochinese refugees to its shores, and which led to a lengthy participation in a failed peacekeeping exercise. In addition to providing some historical background to the current conflict, this paper will also give a brief account of the *raison d'être* for Canada's previous participation and to provide a critical analysis of current Canadian policy.

Before embarking on any consideration of what contribution Canada can make to the situation, however, one must begin by retracing the meandering history of the conflict, studying the nature of the various coalitions to which it has given rise, and understanding the strange and often paradoxical nature of these relationships. Each of the following chapters is designed to clarify Vietnam's place at the centre of the conflict in Indochina; despite the fact that Vietnam was reunited in 1975 and enjoyed a brief period of peace, ever since 1978 it has experienced great difficulty in regaining a place in the international community.

This paper will also consider the new proposals for a settlement which were put forward at the end of 1987; these initiatives are certainly the most encouraging to have appeared since 1978 but one must nonetheless beware of making definitive predictions or conclusions based upon them.*

* The author wishes to thank the Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security for its financial assistance which enabled him to visit Vietnam in July 1987. He is also grateful to his research assistants Pierre Lizée and Liisa Coulombe.

AN OUTLINE OF THE CONFLICTS AND OF CANADIAN POLICY

Since 1945 the situation in the peninsula of Indochina has never ceased to be of military significance. Few conflicts, except perhaps that in the Middle East, have been so complex. Indochina has witnessed in a little over forty years a series of events which include the brutal end of the Japanese occupation, the closing days of French colonial rule, the growth of regional powers such as China and Japan, the intervention of the Superpowers — that of the United States being the most dramatic — and finally the extraordinary strife between fellow members of the Socialist Bloc. Historical antagonisms of a secular nature as well as the current tensions between East and West have been superimposed on a plethora of revolutionary ideologies and national interests.

Vietnam, in particular, has served as a sort of mirror to reveal the inability of the West to understand the fierce determination of a people who were ready to make any sacrifice to preserve their independence and to attain the ultimate goal of reunification. It has also brought to light the great difficulty the West has in understanding a government which does not operate on the same logical plane, but instead treats all initiatives as part of a long-term plan. Western governments, always transitory and ever under pressure, have been brought face to face with a Communist Party which is relatively monolithic, looks at things from a "long term" point of view, and follows a single line of thought, namely that of President Ho Chi Minh. The countries in Indochina have also been the victims of many lost opportunities, for some of which they have only themselves to blame. For example, the end of French colonialism was less peaceful than might have been the case, US intervention could have been carried out more wisely, and Vietnam itself might have been

more successful in its attempts to get back into the international community in 1976 and 1977.

Ever since the Paris Agreements were signed at the end of January 1973, Western analysts have found it virtually impossible to make accurate forecasts concerning either Vietnamese policy or the general situation in Indochina. Few specialists were able to predict the rapid collapse of South Vietnam or the significant deterioration in Vietnam's relations with China. It is worth adding that even China itself did not anticipate Vietnam's intervention in Kampuchea in December 1978, nor did it perhaps fully appreciate, at least at the outset, the cruel fanaticism of its ally, the Khmer Rouge regime.

Less than four years after the fall of Saigon, fighting broke out again; this time the conflict was even more vicious, since it resembled a civil war, with opponents who were former members of the socialist fraternity that was forged throughout the years of resistance to the United States. The following is a brief outline of the train of events which led to this renewed strife in Indochina.

Renewed Conflict in Indochina

No sooner had the last US helicopters beat a hasty retreat in 1975 than the first signs of conflict between the Vietnamese and the Cambodians began to appear. At the same time Beijing viewed the reunification of Vietnam with considerable misgiving. The antagonism between China and the Soviet Union was reflected in Indochina where it inevitably affected relations between Kampuchea, supported by China, and Vietnam, the protégé of the Soviet Union.

The first incidents on the Vietnamese-Cambodian border took place as early as 1975. Until February 1976, however, the two countries continued to negotiate with each other and set up liaison committees to deal with border disputes; these committees carried on their task more or less efficiently until March 1977.[1] That was the year which put paid to

[1] Nayan Chanda, "Clash of Steel Among the Comrades," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 January 1978, p. 10 and 11; see also by the same author "The Bloody Border," in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 21 April 1978, pp. 17-22.

any hope there might have been of restoring normal relations between Hanoi and Phnom Penh. Two attacks, on 30 April and 24 September 1977, for both of which the Khmer Rouge were held responsible, persuaded the Vietnamese government to take punitive military action. On 31 December 1977, Kampuchea broke off diplomatic relations with Vietnam, accusing the latter of widespread aggression, while for his part the Vietnamese Prime Minister let it be known, early in 1978, that Kampuchea's military operations were the result of collusion between the United States and China.[2]

From 1975 onwards the Vietnamese leaders had seemed to be pursuing a more moderate policy in the hope of improving their relations with the members of ASEAN (the Association of South East Asian Nations), of minimizing the consequences of the war with the United States, and of resuming their membership in the major international organizations. In 1978, however, there was a radical change in this policy; Hanoi adopted a more stringent position *vis-à-vis* China, and began to expel Vietnamese of Chinese origin, the Hoa, from the whole of its territory, and above all from Cholon, the Chinese quarter in the former capital Saigon. At the same time Vietnamese leaders did not hesitate to align Vietnam fully with the Soviet Union, by agreeing on 29 June 1978 to become the tenth member of Comecon (the Council of Mutual Economic Assistance). Furthermore, on 2 November 1978, the two countries signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation in Moscow. The most significant article of this treaty was number six, which stipulated that in the event of attacks or threats the two parties would consult each other and take "appropriate measures" to deal with the situation.

Emboldened by Soviet support, Hanoi decided on 25 December 1978 to launch an attack on Kampuchea. In less than a fortnight Vietnamese troops had occupied the whole of Cambodia and had appointed Heng Samrin, a former Khmer Rouge officer who had defected to Vietnam in

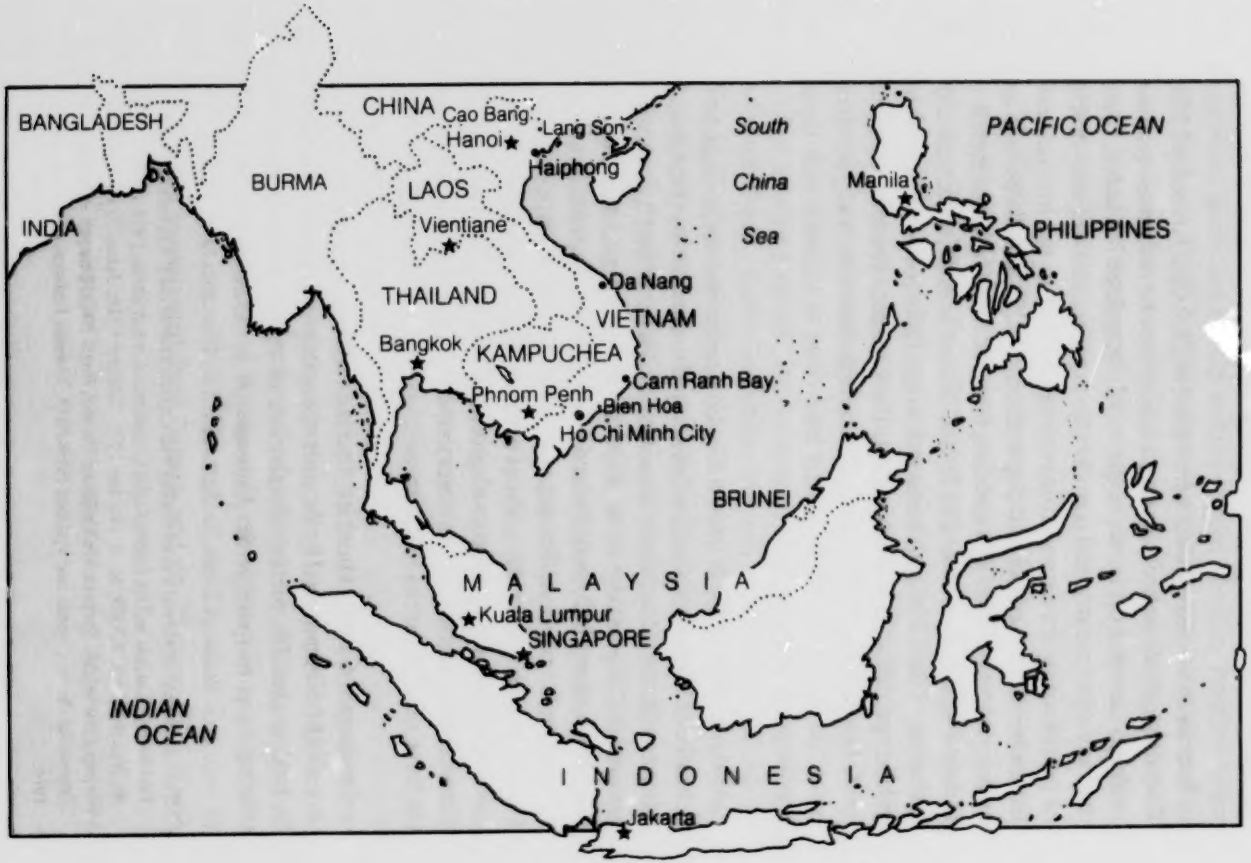
[2] On the hostility between Vietnam and Cambodia and the whole situation in Indochina since 1975 see Nayan Chanda's excellent book, *Brother Enemy. The War after the War. A History of Indochina since the Fall of Saigon*, San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1986, 479 pages.

1977, as head of a provisional revolutionary council. The regime of Pol Pot-Ieng Sary collapsed and China suffered a humiliation which surpassed her worst imaginings. Vietnam had succeeded in defying its powerful neighbour and in so doing abandoned its policy of seeking reconciliation with the other states in Southeast Asia. In its usual way, the Vietnamese government had pursued a strategy which combined clever timing (Christmas), with a favourable international situation and the use of military tactics well suited to achieving quick results; it thus succeeded in confronting the international community with a *fait accompli.*

Among the various reasons which led Vietnam to take this action was the need to secure its borders and put an end to military incursions into its territory. Most of all, however, it wished to placate public feeling in the South, where people were very unwilling to participate in a new struggle against Kampuchea. Vietnam paid little attention to international opinion and preferred instead to install a puppet government in Phnom Penh. On 18 February it concluded a treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation with this same government; the treaty was a duplicate of the one signed with Laos in July 1977. In this way Vietnam made its military presence legitimate.

On 17 February, the day before this treaty was signed, China threw more than 100,000 men into an attack on its border with Vietnam. This "lesson" which China intended to teach Vietnam came to an end on 5 March when China announced that it was withdrawing its forces. The operation had not been a great military success and had made China aware of the dilapidated state of its forces and the weakness of its commanders. The attack by China did not attract any reprisals on the part of the Soviet Union and was warmly welcomed by the members of ASEAN.

Thus, by the end of February 1979 the conflict between China and Vietnam had been superimposed on the problem of Kampuchea. This increased the stakes and introduced many more conflicting interests. The period of calm in Indochina had been short-lived and once again it had become a focal point of international tension.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BRUNEI
M A L A Y S I A
Kuala Lumpur
SINGAPORE
INDIAN
OCEAN
I N D O N E S I A
Jakarta

CANADA — SUPPORT FROM THE SIDELINES

Ever since the Agreements were signed in Paris on 27 January 1973, Canada's attitude, not only to this settlement but also to its consequences, could be summed up by the single word "skepticism." Canada, more than any other country, had considerable experience serving on a variety of peacekeeping forces and commissions. Its role in the International Commission for Control and Supervision (ICCS) after 1954 was an endless source of frustration and disagreement. Canada found itself in a situation where it was clear that Poland did not intend to denounce any violations of the 1954 agreement and where India made no attempt to hide its sympathy for North Vietnam. The Canadian government found itself obliged to serve US interests even though there were many points of policy on which Canadian leaders held views at variance with those prevalent in Washington.[3]

In the late fall of 1972, when it seemed possible that there might be a cease-fire in Vietnam, Canada was dismayed to discover that the US had agreed with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam that yet another international supervisory commission should be set up consisting, this time, of Hungary, Indonesia, Poland and Canada. In the end, however, no agreement on a cease-fire was reached in October, and this allowed Canada, which was in the midst of a federal election, to defer any decision. Finally, on 27 January an agreement was signed and as foreseen Canada was asked to become a member of the Commission, along with the three other countries noted above.

Once again Canada found itself taking on a role which it had in no way sought. Embarrassed by the turn of events — for it did not want to be held responsible for any breakdown of this fragile settlement by refusing to participate in the Commission — Ottawa also found it

[3] There are several works and articles dealing with Canada's role in the ICCS, see among others Paul Bridle, "Canada and the International Commissions in Indochina, 1954-1972," *Behind the Headlines*, vol. XXXII, no. 4, October 1973, Toronto: CIIA; James Eayrs, *Indochina: Roots of Complicity*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983; Douglas A. Ross, *In the Interests of Peace: Canada and Vietnam 1954-1973*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984.

difficult to refuse a role that was the logical outcome of its frequently expressed desire that the US withdraw from Vietnam. Another factor was that, as in 1954, China seemed to be in favour of Canadian participation. This was at the time of a rapprochement between Canada and China, and trade negotiations were already underway between Ottawa and Beijing.

The Canadian government was very canny, however; it agreed to send a contingent of 290 soldiers and civilians to Vietnam, but only for an initial period of sixty days. In February, Ottawa recognized the Republic of Vietnam, thus giving legal recognition to the two Vietnams and thereby making the task of the Canadian delegation to the Supervisory Commission correspondingly easier.[4]

The following month, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mitchell Sharp, visited Indochina and met government officials in Saigon, Vientiane and Hanoi. On his return, Sharp told the Commons Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence that despite all the efforts which the Canadian delegation had made, the Commission was not accomplishing the tasks which had been assigned to it by the terms of the ceasefire. There had been thousands of incidents including some large-scale military engagements. Nonetheless, Canada agreed to serve for another sixty days so as to avoid endangering the ceasefire by withdrawing from the Commission. At the end of this second period, however, Sharp announced on 29 May 1973 that Canada would withdraw from the Commission.

The events of 1975 had little effect on Canada's attitude to Indochina. When the Khmer Rouge captured the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh on 17 April and overthrew the Lon Nol regime, Canada recognized this new government of Kampuchea, though it did not establish diplomatic relations with it.[5] The staff of the Canadian Embassy in Vietnam was evacuated from Saigon, and on 25 June 1975 it was

[4] See Gérard Hervouet, *Le Canada face à l'Asie de l'Est*, Montréal: Nouvelle optique, 1981, page 110.

[5] *Ibid.*, page 112.

decided to establish diplomatic relations with the provisional government of the Republic of South Vietnam. The reunification of Vietnam took place the following year and Canada did not need to recognize the new state officially, since its relations with it were a continuation of those already established with the previous governments of North and South Vietnam respectively. In Laos, the coming to power of the Pathet Lao in August 1975 had not led to any change in Canada's position, since it simply carried on with the new government the relationship which it had established with its predecessor on 15 June 1974; the Canadian ambassador in Thailand remained accredited to the government of Laos.

From 1975 to the end of 1978, Canada's relations with Vietnam were more or less normal. While Canada continued to have considerable reservations about the government in Hanoi it nonetheless maintained commercial relations with Vietnam and continued to provide it with development assistance, including a significant quantity of food. Several projects sponsored by non-governmental organizations continued to receive funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). This was the case with the Canadian Save the Children Fund, the Canadian Council of Churches, Oxfam Canada, Oxfam Quebec, and the Canadian Lutheran World Relief.[6]

It might have been expected that Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea at the end of December 1978 would have provoked strong reactions. In fact, however, as Kim Nossal demonstrates most convincingly, this did not happen; the Canadian government made little comment on these developments. Surprisingly enough it was equally discreet in bringing to an end its development assistance programme the following February.[7] A Canadian election was in progress at this time and the situation in Indochina was far from being uppermost in the minds of either ministers or members of parliament. It was only at the Security Council meeting of 24 February 1979 that the Canadian representative joined his Australian

[6] *Ibid.*, page 127.

[7] For an account of Canada's attitude since 1978 see Kim Richard Nossal's stimulating article, "Les sanctions économiques et les petits Etats: le cas de la 'punition' du Vietnam par le Canada," *Etudes Internationales*, vol. XVIII, no. 3, September 1987, pages 523-544.

and New Zealand colleagues in expressing his country's concern about what was going on.[8]

The change of government in June 1979 was marked by a hardening of the Canadian position, however. This was reflected in an increased emphasis on human rights and a desire to improve relations with China and also with the members of ASEAN, while at the same time maintaining Canada's support for the UN and for multilateral diplomacy. While the first aspect of this policy was certainly in tune with the attitudes of the time, it also echoed the principles then being advocated by the White House. Flora MacDonald, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, made no bones about her intention to "make sure that Canadian foreign policy places increased emphasis on the question of human rights" and added, "We will be on the look out for any infringements of international agreements such as the Declaration of Human Rights and the Helsinki Accord."[9]

At the same time, however, though the majority of the Canadian population was relatively unaware of the paradox this involved, the Canadian government attached priority to expanding its trade with China and the members of ASEAN, some of which (Indonesia and the Philippines in particular) had been unfavourably criticized in the annual reports of Amnesty International.

Canadian aid was suspended in February,[10] and on 17 September Macdonald told the Canadian Club of Montreal that, "In light of the policy of violation of human rights that has been recently followed by Vietnam we have cut off our aid programmes to that country."[11] This speech, like many others, made no mention of Kampuchea. In November, however, Canada was a co-sponsor of Resolution A/34/L.13 which was put forward at the United Nations by the

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8 "Canada reminds the Security Council of its Southeast Asian responsibilities," *Statements and Speeches*, no. 79/1, Department of External Affairs, Canada, 1979.

9 Gérard Hervouet, *op.cit.*, page 139.

10 *International Canada*, July and August 1979, page 189.

11 "Canada's Foreign Policy," *Statements and Speeches*, no. 79/15, Department of External Affairs, Canada, 1979, page 3.

ASEAN countries; it called for an end to hostilities, the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Kampuchea and a settlement of the dispute by peaceful means.

Canada has continued to support this resolution ever since while refusing to recognize the Heng Samrin regime in Kampuchea, which is supported by Vietnam. Like many other countries Canada finds that this places it in an embarrassing position, since in effect it seems to imply recognition of the previous Khmer Rouge regime as the only legitimate government of Kampuchea. The Canadian government tries to square the legalistic circle by its wholehearted condemnation of the genocide practiced by the Pol Pot regime.[12] In June 1982 when China and the members of ASEAN proposed the formation of a Coalition Government for Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) which would include the Khmer Rouge, Prince Sihanouk and the former prime minister, Son Sann, Canada supported this proposal and agreed to recognize the CGDK as the only legitimate government of Kampuchea.[13]

Certain salient points emerge from this brief resumé of Canadian policy:

- Canada has pursued the same policy towards Indochina since 1979. Regardless of whether a Liberal or Conservative government is in power Canada has continued to condemn Vietnam and holds it responsible for the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, Cambodians and Laotians.

- Although Canada has been more concerned with caring for the refugees, whom the Canadian population welcomed with unprecedented generosity, than with the occupation of Kampuchea by Vietnamese troops, it has nonetheless condemned this action and it continues every year to support the UN resolution calling for the withdrawal of "foreign troops" from Cambodia.

[12] "The Situation in Kampuchea," *Statements and Speeches*, no. 79/24, Department of External Affairs, Canada, 1979, page 2.

[13] Kim Richard Nossal, *op.cit.*, page 531.

- While it has roundly condemned the Pol Pot regime, Canada nonetheless legally recognises the latter as the only rightful government of Kampuchea, and it supports the Coalition Government in Exile of which the Khmer Rouge remain the most essential part.

- Canada, together with China, the United States and the ASEAN countries, has taken a hard line with the Government in Hanoi, in the hope of persuading it to withdraw its troops from Kampuchea. In pursuit of this objective, and in solidarity with its allies, Ottawa has agreed to ban Vietnam from the international community.

- Canada has not broken off diplomatic relations with Hanoi and maintains certain links with Vietnam through its embassy in Bangkok. On the other hand Vietnam receives no Canadian aid, trade between the two countries is negligible and there are virtually no contacts in other fields.

- Canada supports a political solution to the conflict in Indochina. While it is only marginally involved in this dispute it nonetheless supports the initiatives which ASEAN has taken at the United Nations, but it avoids any action which might force it to play a more active role.

In order to decide whether the above policy makes sense, one must begin by studying the complex nature of the conflict in Indochina and attempting to understand how it has developed, and what new approaches have arisen for a possible solution. The following chapters will provide such an analysis.

THE DEADLOCK: RIGID AND PARADOXICAL POSITIONS

The disputes in Indochina are numerous, interdependent, yet distinct. They resemble a Chinese curio in which the balls, which have been labouriously sculpted at the centre of a block of ivory, can move around yet never escape — each one is trapped by the others. Since the war began in Kampuchea, the conflict has come to have much wider implications and has gone from being one which involves regional antagonisms to one with implications for Sino-Soviet rivalry and East-West relations. Kampuchea's future is now entangled in such a maze of interlocking interests that it would seem impossible to deal with it in any single set of negotiations.

THE GROWTH OF EXTREMISM

Improvisation is not a term which can aptly be applied to Vietnamese policy. There is no doubt that the Vietnamese leaders, who are battle-hardened and past masters of the art of strategy, knew exactly what they were about when their troops invaded Kampuchea on 25 December 1978.

Throughout 1978 the diplomatic campaign which had preceded this offensive did not produce the results which were anticipated. The Vietnamese leaders — especially the Prime Minister, Pham Van Dong, the Foreign Minister, Nguyen Co Thach and his Vice Minister, Phan Hien — had spent the year wooing their opposite numbers in the ASEAN countries in the hope of obtaining a treaty of friendship with ASEAN. This attempt failed, as did Vietnam's efforts to persuade their critics that China represented the greatest threat to Southeast Asia.[14]

[14] Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy. The War after the War*, op.cit., page 319.

On the other hand, as was noted above, the Vietnamese government had taken advantage of an opportune moment to gain the support of the Soviet Union. Thus assured of Soviet backing, Hanoi could also count on China not intervening, since the latter was too preoccupied with modernization and with restoring normal relations with other countries both in Asia and the West. Vietnam could also assume that the international community would be glad to see the end of the Khmer Rouge. In addition, since the beginning of 1978, it had been engaged in training on Vietnamese territory, a large number of Khmer rebels who had abandoned Pol Pot. It was this activity which enabled the Kampuchean National Front to be founded on 2 December at a ceremony inside Cambodia; Heng Samrin, the future president of Kampuchea and himself a former Khmer Rouge, was appointed as its leader.[15] The military operation in Kampuchea was carried out swiftly, in a way which bore some resemblance to the Soviet interventions in Hungary and Czechoslovakia, and it achieved its basic objective which was to overthrow the Khmer Rouge government.

In the light of later events it is easy to claim that Vietnam made a serious mistake in underestimating the effect this humiliation would have on China. Even at a time when it was preoccupied with the modernization of its economy, Beijing could not afford to lose face in a contest with such great historical symbolism, a contest which was both ideological, since the Khmer Rouge drew their inspiration from Mao, and geopolitical, because of the Soviet Union's support for the Vietnamese initiative.

By intervening against Vietnam in February 1979, China gave the conflict new significance. From then on the antagonism between Vietnam and China would be the essential feature in any understanding of the actions of all those involved, whether directly or indirectly, in this new war.

A second error which had serious consequences for Vietnam was that it failed to establish complete control over Cambodia in the first weeks of

[15] *Ibid.*, page 339.

the invasion. This failure left a sufficient number of Khmer Rouge free to conduct guerilla warfare.[16] After they had regrouped at the Thai border, these resistance troops, which were mainly Khmer Rouge, resumed the fight against the Vietnamese, and although they suffered a series of defeats they were nonetheless able to retain a certain credibility. They settled down in camps inside Thailand, and succeeded in attracting new recruits from among the vast number of refugees, all the while receiving aid from China with the agreement of Bangkok.

This new situation had a profound effect on the stability of Thailand as well as on the fate of thousands of Khmer refugees who now found themselves dependent on the outcome of a political gamble in a far-reaching regional dispute. When questioned about the Khmers and the unstable situation on the Thai border, during the course of an ASEAN foreign ministers' meeting in Kuala Lumpur in June 1980, the Canadian Secretary of State for External Affairs replied: "These [skirmishes] are not really as bad as having a lack of fighting as a result of a Vietnamese conquest of Kampuchea."[17]

Thus realism won out and the need to support the resistance forces was the favoured form of opposition used by states opposed to Vietnam. On 22 June 1982 the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea (CGDK) was set up under the auspices of ASEAN. This coalition consisted of three groups, the *Armée Nationale Sihanoukiste* (ANS), the nationalists in the Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) and the Khmer Rouge of Democratic Kampuchea (DK). Prince Sihanouk became president of Democratic Kampuchea, Kieu Samphan was the vice-president and Son Sann the Prime Minister.[18]

The third error which Vietnam made, though at the time it must have seemed less significant as far as the Vietnamese leaders were concerned,

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[16] *Ibid.*, page 347.

[17] *Asia Yearbook 1981*, Hong Kong: F.E.E.R., 1982, page 14.

[18] One must note that the Khmer Rouge insist that they have retained the right to break this agreement and return to the previous situation in which they were the only legitimate representatives of Democratic Kampuchea. See "East Asia" in *Strategic Survey*, London: IISS, 1982-1983, page 96.

was to have underestimated the ability of the members of ASEAN to line up strong opposition to Vietnam at the United Nations. In 1979, ninety-one countries voted in favour of the ASEAN resolution condemning Vietnam. Since then the same resolution has been put forward every year at the United Nations and by 1986 one hundred and fifteen countries were voting in favour of it.[19] In calling for, among other things, the withdrawal of all "foreign forces" from Kampuchea, the restoration of the country's independence and the right of self-determination for its people, the resolution nonetheless provides somewhat paradoxical juridical support for the Khmer Rouge as the only legitimate representatives, even though it includes an unequivocal condemnation of the Pol Pot regime.

These votes at the United Nations have served, however, to seal Vietnam's isolation by depriving it of any financial or economic aid and thus making it all the more dependent on the Soviet Union. The alignments subsequently became more and more rigid, leading to an impasse in which none of the actors could afford to make the slightest concession to the other side.

Strange Bedfellows

One of the greatest difficulties in any conflict is reaching a complete understanding of the genuine objectives of those most involved. Put somewhat simplistically, it is always easier to tell what people are opposed to than what it is they really want to achieve. This is certainly true of the various groups involved in Indochina since 1979. As time passed and the situation developed, the objectives and intentions of these groups changed although no one is willing to admit this, lest the very existence of a coalition is put at risk. The two main coalitions confronting each other in Indochina are notable for their strange composition and the difficulty they have in staying together.

The first coalition is drawn up along the Phnom Penh, Hanoi, Moscow axis. The group opposed to it is much more divergent and

[19] *ASEAN Newsletter*, no. 17, September-October 1986, page 8.

includes the CGDK, China, ASEAN and a large number of Western powers including the US and Canada. Since Vietnam was initially responsible for invading Kampuchea it is the anchor of the first coalition; its interests and objectives dictate to a greater or lesser extent the behaviour of both the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of Kampuchea. Relations between Hanoi and the Heng Samrin government in Phnom Penh are relatively easier to define than those between Hanoi and Moscow. The Heng Samrin Government is in effect the puppet of Vietnam, to which it is bound by the peace and friendship treaty of 18 February 1979. This treaty lends legitimacy to the presence of the Vietnamese troops and incorporates Kampuchea as part of the *solidarité indochinoise* of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea. The Heng Samrin regime is completely subservient to the Vietnamese government and has no choice but to collaborate and to place both troops and supplies at its disposal.

Although the Cambodian people were undeniably glad to be rid of the Pol Pot regime they are not prepared to go on showing gratitude to their Vietnamese liberators forever. In addition, as Nayan Chanda points out, the Vietnamese have not made any great effort to counteract the traditional animosity which the Cambodians feel towards them.[20] As time goes on the Kampuchean army seems to be less and less enthusiastic about the struggle against the guerillas, and it is the Vietnamese soldiers who have to bear the brunt of the war.

The Vietnamese leaders are well aware of how unpopular they are in Cambodia. One of those to whom I spoke in Hanoi acknowledged quite frankly that "no country is content to be occupied by foreign troops." But he claimed to be confident, nonetheless, that Kampuchea would take over its own defence when the Vietnamese troops withdrew as promised in 1990. He told me that in 1945, "we had 5,000 men when we began the war; by 1990, the date on which we withdraw our troops, Kampuchea will have had the time to acquire a real army to defend itself."[21] The Vietnamese are even more embarrassed if one raises the subject of their military presence in Laos since it cannot be explained in terms of internal

[20] Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy. The War After the War, op.cit.*, page 370.

[21] Interview with the President of the *Institute of International Relations*, Hanoi, July 1987.

security as it can in Kampuchea.[22] Everything would seem to suggest — and this point will developed later — that in the long term Hanoi will only accept conditions for a settlement which ensure that the governments in Vientiane and Phnom Penh toe the party line.

Thus, Vietnam's strict control of Kampuchea implies that the latter must do what it is told and play a passive role rather than initiate action. This means that the leaders in Phnom Penh cannot risk deviating from the official Vietnamese policy as it is laid down at the annual or biennial meetings of the three Indochinese foreign ministers.

The attitude the Soviet Union adopts to the conflict in Kampuchea is also largely determined by Vietnam — however paradoxical this may appear at first sight. While it is true that Hanoi's economic dependence on its big brother has numerous effects on the Vietnamese economy, nonetheless as far as the dynamic of the conflict is concerned Moscow cannot afford to put too much pressure on its only viable ally in East Asia. While fears of a rapprochement between the Soviet Union and China may complicate Vietnam's strategy, in the end, they cannot change the intransigent attitude of the Vietnamese in one fell swoop. Vietnamese spokesmen told me that they were glad to see increased contacts between Moscow and Beijing since this, in their opinion, would inevitably lead to an improvement in Sino-Vietnamese relations.[23] Thus even if the Soviet Union plays a significant part in the coalition, its control is far from absolute in the eyes of the Vietnamese leaders, since the latter believe, with good reason, that Vietnam is too useful for achieving Soviet aims in East Asia for its views to be easily disregarded.[24]

The members of the large coalition opposed to Vietnam have such a wide variety of interests that this produces very strange and anomalous relationships. The chief member of this coalition, and the one largely responsible for any initiatives, is China. In open conflict with Vietnam,

[22] During the interviews which the author had in Hanoi the presence of Vietnamese troops in Laos seemed much harder to justify than in Kampuchea.

[23] Interviews at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hanoi, July 1987.

[24] Interview with Nguyen Co Thach, "L'Indochine neutralisée," *Politique internationale*, no. 31, Spring 1986, page 233.

China has put forward proposals for a peaceful settlement of the dispute, furnishes the Khmer Rouge with arms, protects Thailand, ensures that Vietnamese troops have to be kept mobilized along the Sino-Vietnamese border, and is pursuing a gradual rapprochement with the Soviet Union in a way which is likely to undermine the latter's support for Vietnam.

The counterpart to the Heng Samrin regime in this larger coalition is the CGDK, which is used by both China and members of ASEAN to further their own policies. In order to make this coalition government appear legitimate the Khmer Rouge has to collaborate with the two other, non-communist, groups, while they in turn have to accept partnership with the Khmer Rouge in order to give credibility to their own resistance movement in Cambodia.

The CGDK reflects all the various disasters which have befallen Cambodia since 1945; it is no more than an assembly of groups with inherently contradictory interests, lacking all credibility, which have been brought together only by the nature of the circumstances and by their common hatred of the Vietnamese. Each of the three factions has established a series of bases in Thailand and they direct resistance operations in Cambodia with varying degrees of success. The three groups do not coordinate their activities to any extent and it is hard to estimate their military effectiveness. According to a representative of the Vietnamese Army newspaper, the Khmer Rouge have approximately 28,000 men, the KPNLF of Son Sann about 18,000, and the army of Sihanouk about 9,000.[25]

In addition to organizing an active resistance movement the coalition government also serves the interests of China and ASEAN, but cannot be considered a reasonable substitute for the current government in Phnom Penh. Indeed, a brief account of the factions which form this coalition shows that each of them has always been at loggerheads with the other two. Prince Sihanouk during his reign, for example, tried to win over the Kampuchean Communist Party by gaining the support of Khieu Samphan, persecuting other left wing movements all the while but

[25] Interview with a representative of *Quan Doi Nhan Dan*, Hanoi, 1987.

maintaining good relations with Hanoi. His attitude towards the Vietnamese regularly antagonized the movements of the right, such as the Khmers Issarak, the precursors of the Khmers Serei (Free Khmers) and it was they, led by General Lon Nol, who instigated the coup d'etat against Sihanouk in 1970.[26] It is also worth recalling that in 1968 Sihanouk tried to move to the right by appointing Son Sann prime minister, but the latter held that post for only a few months before going into exile. Finally, when the Khmer Rouge came to power in 1975 they persuaded Sihanouk to return to Kampuchea. He was relegated, however, to a purely symbolic role and later forced to withdraw from public life.

The artificial nature of the CGDK and the bitter dislike which the leaders of the three groups feel for each other, explains, at least to some extent, why ASEAN, the Europeans and the United States are all loath to give it anything more than political support.

China supports the Khmer Rouge, though with little enthusiasm, and accepts Sihanouk as an ally only because of what he symbolizes, but it cannot bring itself to accept directly the KPNLF nationalists, represented by Son Sann. The members of ASEAN, on the other hand, Thailand in particular, while making it possible for China to provide the Kampuchean resistance with arms, cannot bring themselves to provide military assistance to the Khmer Rouge. Thus, in the final analysis, the large coalition opposed to Vietnam is not really committed to bringing about a military victory for the CGDK. What some members of the large coalition want to do is to use the CGDK in a war of attrition to prolong a situation which will gradually undermine Vietnam, benefitting all the while from certain guarantees from China concerning the security of Southeast Asia, especially Thailand, and protecting the latter against nationalist liberation movements which will henceforward receive no further aid from Beijing.

This makes it easier to understand what an expert like Chang Pao-min has in mind when he writes: "In fact cynics argue that the ASEAN states,

[26] Craig Etcheson, "Civil War and the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea," *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 9, no. 1, January 1987, pages 187-203.

including Thailand, are in no hurry to see the war end and would like to have all the Communist participants in the war, including the Khmer Rouge, worn out by the continuing conflict so that communism as a general phenomenon would pose a smaller and at least less immediate threat to other parts of Southeast Asia."[27]

One can also understand the bitterness of Prince Sihanouk when he drew the same conclusions and said "Thailand has no reason to cease to encourage us to go on fighting; for it that is 'one less war' . . . As for China, it does not really want us to reach a settlement: there has to be an abscess in Asia and it is Cambodia. The Chinese are well aware that I will have enormous difficulty in reaching any settlement and they are tacitly in agreement with the Soviet Union in trying to maintain the deadlock."[28]

Thus the two large coalitions which oppose each other in Indochina use the Khmers as intermediaries to fight their battle for them in Cambodia. Each side is the prisoner of an almost identical strategy which aims at carrying on a war of attrition. Each believes time is on its side and that it will be able to outlast its opponent, and profit politically from the other's exhaustion. The fact that both coalitions are motivated by the same logic dictated by similar interests has produced a deadlock which has now lasted for nine years.

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[27] Chang Pao-min, "Kampuchean Conflict. The Continuing Stalemate," *Asian Survey*, vol. XXVII, no. 7, July 1987, page 757.

[28] Interview with Norodom Sihanouk, "Libérer le Cambodge," *Politique internationale, op.cit.*, page 263.

CHINA AND VIETNAM — THE MAIN ANTAGONISTS

Vietnam's history has been bound up with that of China from the very beginning and it is a challenge for the conscientious historian to trace the origins of the tension between these two countries to what happened long ago. The further back one goes the more one has an impression of déjà vu. Indeed this impression is so striking that one should be wary of concluding too quickly that the Vietnamese and the Chinese are simply conforming to a tradition of conflict passed on to them from previous generations. It is always astonishing to discover to what extent historical events, even very distant ones, still have a considerable impact on states which claim to have radically changed the structure of their society through revolutionary ideology.

In China, as in Vietnam, talk of conflict between them is no longer expressed in ideological terms. The arguments which are used by both sides refer to important events in their history, to current geopolitical considerations and to their national interests. It is just as pointless to carry historical analogies too far, however, as it is to try to minimize the age-old resentment which the two countries feel towards each other.

THE IMPERIAL PAST AND ITS EFFECT ON STRATEGY

According to the representative of the Vietnamese newspaper *Quan Doi Nhan Dan* the Western press often fails to understand the meaning of incidents which take place on the Chinese-Vietnamese border. "For us," he said "it is easier; we know that the Chinese make use of such incidents to mark an anniversary or remind us of an earlier battle, sometimes a

very ancient one." According to this spokesman some of the skirmishes which took place at the end of 1986 and the beginning of 1987 caused little concern because the Chinese were simply using them to mark the eighth anniversary of the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea.[29]

This interpretation, while not totally convincing, is nonetheless interesting, since it reflects the enduring tradition of symbolic exchanges between the two countries and above all their capacity to interpret these correctly. China's attempts to exert pressure on Vietnam date from about 208 BC, when the first Vietnamese kingdom was established. China maintained a sort of feudal hold over the neighbouring states from which it exacted tribute and Vietnam was part of this system until 939 AD when it gained its independence as a result of defeating the Chinese in battle. In 981 the Vietnamese inflicted another defeat on China, this time on the Song dynasty. It was only during a twenty-year interlude, from 1407 to 1427, that the Ming dynasty succeeded in reimposing control over Vietnam and reintroducing Chinese customs. Even during these twenty years, however, the Chinese had to cope with Vietnamese resistance which was shown in a variety of ways, such as refusing to wear the pigtail and lacquering their teeth in accordance with Vietnamese tradition. This resistance lasted up to the time of the guerrilla war which resulted in Vietnam regaining its independence in 1427. In 1788 China suffered yet another setback when the Qing dynasty was humiliated in its attempt to regain Vietnam as a Chinese protectorate.[30]

Before this, in 1471, the kingdom of Champa, more or less the equivalent of modern-day South Vietnam, was taken over by Vietnam, but relations between the North and the South remained difficult and were marked by bitter rivalries between the Trinh in the North and the Nguyen in the South. At the same time Vietnam was trying to gain control over the Laotian principalities in order to use them as a shield against Thailand. Finally, in 1658 Vietnam sent an expeditionary force to intervene in the interminable struggle for the Khmer throne, and in

[29] The author's interview with a representative of *Quan Doi Nhan Dan*, Hanoi, July 1987.

[30] See for instance Takashi Tajima, "China and Southeast Asia: Strategic Interests and Policy Prospects," *Adelphi Papers*, no. 172, London: IISS, 1981, pages 9-10.

1660 Cambodia began to pay regular tribute as a vassal to the court of Huế.[31]

Even such a brief account of this early history suggests fascinating historical parallels with the events of today. The most important thing to notice, however, is that China has always tried to prevent the unification of Indochina. Everywhere in Southeast Asia the fundamental thrust of Chinese strategy has remained the same. By dividing the kingdoms and exploiting the rivalry between dynasties and, in more recent times, between nationalist movements, China has tried and continues to try to maintain its traditional influence. These rivalries between the various states of Indochina have also affected Siam, or Thailand as it is known today.

In modern times Vietnam has always been the most troublesome member of this fragile balancing act. It has never ceased to be at odds with China and has always wanted to control the whole of Indochina. French colonialism caused a temporary lull in these regional conflicts but they very quickly reemerged as soon as the first war in Indochina came to an end.

Recent Grudges

On two occasions China helped Vietnam in its struggle against French imperialism. During the period from 1945 to 1954 China did not choose to confront France directly as it had during the period of colonial expansion but did provide the Viet-Minh with both ideological and material support. However, after the 1954 Geneva Conference it quickly became apparent that collaboration between the two was more a matter of words than of deeds.

In 1979 Hanoi published a white paper entitled, *The truth concerning Vietnamese-Chinese relations over the last thirty years.* This study described all the obstacles which China had put in the way of Vietnamese reunification since 1954.[32] While the argument is not always

[31] Thanh H. Vuong, "Les colonisations du Viet Nam et le colonialisme vietnamien," *Etudes internationales*, vol. XVII, no. 3, September 1987, page 558.

[32] Takashi Tajima, *op. cit.*, page 11.

convincing, a number of the facts mentioned are undeniably true. Among them was the pressure to which China undoubtedly subjected the Vietnamese delegation at the Geneva Conference. Vietnam had to agree that neither the Pathet Lao nor the Khmers Issarak would be represented at the Geneva Conference, that Vietnam would be divided in two and that there would be a wait of two years before general elections would take place in South Vietnam.

François Joyaux, who has verified these claims by obtaining access to the French archives has described the situation as follows:

> Was it not China that persuaded Vietnam at the Geneva Conference in 1954 that it should withdraw its troops from Laos, that it could not obtain a sanctuary in Cambodia for the Khmers who had supported the Viet-Minh, that the two kingdoms must remain strictly neutral and that the RDVN itself could not play the role it had wanted? Furthermore it was China which persuaded the Viet-Minh to accept the partition of Vietnam along the seventeenth parallel; this left colonial route 9, which was the only road connecting Laos to the outside world and which provided the economic link between Vientiane and Saigon, in the territory allocated to the South.[33]

Thus, even from the time of the Geneva Conference, China devoted a good deal of effort to keeping Laos and Cambodia neutral; in so doing it was acting more in keeping with its traditional policy of keeping Indochina fragmented than with that of showing solidarity with other Socialist states. After the second Geneva Conference of 1961-1962 China chose to maintain a neutralist government in Laos in opposition to the Pathet Lao, and in 1963 President Liu Shao Qi in the course of an official visit to Phnom Penh, expressed Beijing's support for the neutralist policy of Prince Norodom Sihanouk. For the Chinese communists Sihanouk's neutrality was not only a guarantee that the US would not intervene but above all it was also the most suitable way of thwarting Hanoi's hegemony.

[33] François Joyaux, "Réflexions sur la politique chinoise en Indochine," in P. de Beauregard et al., *La politique asiatique de la Chine*, Paris: Fondation pour les études de défense nationale, 1986, page 213. See also by the same author *La Chine et le règlement du premier conflit d'Indochine, Genève 1954*, Paris: Publication de la Sorbonne, 1979, 468 pages.

In 1960, profiting from growing tensions between Moscow and Beijing, North Vietnam set out to liberate the South and created the National Liberation Front (NLF) with this in view. From then on Hanoi tried in vain to act as an intermediary for the "two big brothers who were enemies" and in the years which followed it took great care to treat Moscow and Beijing in such a way that it could not be said to show a preference for one or the other.

Hanoi received help from both the Soviet Union and China throughout the course of the second war in Vietnam, but at the same time it suffered from the repercussions of the Sino-Soviet tensions and from the Cultural Revolution in China, a revolution itself no stranger to conflict. It was not without difficulty that China decided to support the People's war in Vietnam while avoiding any direct intervention by Chinese forces.[34] In 1965 the decision put an end to the career of Lo Rui-chin as Commander-in-Chief of the Chinese Army. For the Vietnamese the Cultural Revolution was "a great step backwards" and a sign of "socialist decadence."[35] From that time on Hanoi began to distance itself from Beijing.

In 1968 Vietnam agreed to enter into preliminary negotiations with the United States. China had not been consulted and had indeed shown itself to be opposed to any such negotiations. On the other hand, Vietnam's policies were coming more and more into line with those of the Soviet Union, whether on such matters as the Czechoslovakian uprising in 1968, the fall of Allende in Chili in 1973, or the coming to power of the Portuguese Communist party in 1974.

China greeted the Paris Accords of 1973 with a great deal of enthusiasm since the continued existence of two Vietnams was part of its traditional strategy. Since the previous year, Vietnam's feeling of resentment towards the Chinese had been growing. Nixon's visit to China in February 1972 convinced Hanoi that the Chinese could no

[34] See for instance, M. Yahuda, "Kremlinology and the Chinese Strategic Debate," *China Quarterly*, no. 49, January-March 1972, pages 32-75.

[35] Nguyen Manh Hung, "The Sino-Vietnamese Conflict: Power Play Among Communist Neighbours," *Asian Survey*, vol. XIX, no. 11, November 1979, page 1038.

longer be relied on. The Vietnamese also believed that China and the US had concluded a secret agreement to maintain the Thieu government in South Vietnam in exchange for the gradual return of Taiwan to China.

Although there was an attempt to preserve appearances, for example, during the visit of Le Duan and Pham Van Dong to Beijing in June 1973, differences between the two countries grew ever more serious. In order to prevent Vietnam from achieving the reunification which it sought and thus gaining control of the whole of Indochina, China encouraged the NLF, supported Laos and, above all, unabashedly encouraged the rise of radical pro-Chinese elements in the revolutionary government of the National Union of Kampuchea (GRUNK) which had taken refuge in Beijing.[36]

In April 1975 Hanoi won. Its troops were in Saigon and the Chinese had no choice but to applaud this as a great revolutionary victory and a triumph for the Maoist doctrine of a "people's war."[37]

Elements of Open Conflict

As soon as Vietnam was reunited, the latent conflict between China and Vietnam quickly came into the open. Paradoxically, China's determination to keep the Soviet Union out of Indochina only resulted in an ever closer alignment between Hanoi and Moscow. Haunted by the fear that Vietnam would establish a federation in Indochina[38] the Chinese made one mistake after another — trying to force Vietnam to join an anti-Soviet front, and supporting the particularly odious regime of the Khmer Rouge in Kampuchea.

In May 1975, China and Vietnam signed a protocol for the provision of essential aid, but by September when Le Duan made another visit to Beijing, China and Vietnam began to realize how widely they differed.

[36] François Joyaux, "Réflections sur la politique chinoise en Indochine," *op.cit.*, page 210.

[37] See Sheldon W. Simon, "Peking and Indochina: The Perplexity of Victory," *Asian Survey*, May 1976, pages 401-410.

[38] On the idea of an Indochinese Federation see for instance Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy. The War after the War, op.cit.*, pages 117-118.

No communiqué could be issued at the close of the visit. On the other hand the secretary of the Vietnamese Labour Party visited Moscow the following month. At the close of this official visit a communiqué was issued which expressed "a complete identity of views between the two countries concerning foreign policy."

The first two aid agreements with the Soviet Union were signed shortly after this, one being for immediate assistance, and the second for aid in the context of Vietnam's second Five Year Plan. In the latter case the aid amounted to US $2.5 billions.[39]

In February 1976 Le Duan visited Moscow once again and participated in the 25th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, where he attributed Vietnam's victory to the support it had received from the Soviet Union. In December of the same year the Vietnamese Communist Party held its fourth Party Congress in Hanoi, the first such meeting since re-unification. What had been previously been known as the Labour Party, became officially known as the Communist Party of Vietnam and all the pro-Chinese members were expelled from its ranks and from various levels of the bureaucracy.[40]

At the beginning of 1977 China announced that there were seven points at issue between it and Vietnam: Vietnamese slanders concerning China, the land boundary, railway maintenance, the status of the Nansha (Paracels) and Xisha (Spratly) Islands, the waters of the Gulf of Beibu, the position of the Chinese in Vietnam, and economic aid. The list of grievances was a long one but it omitted the real point of contention —the situation in Kampuchea. As it happened, this period of the conflict in Kampuchea was developing in a way which relegated China to the background. Only China's territorial claims concerning border areas, its control of the Paracels Islands since 3 January 1974, and its claims to sovereignty over the Spratly Islands, constituted more tangible points of

[39] Léon Vandermeersh, *Le nouveau monde sinisé*, Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1986, page 115.

[40] *Ibid.*, page 115.

contention over and above the underlying political disagreement.[41]

During the whole of 1977 Pol Pot's troops engaged in numerous clashes with the Vietnamese troops along their common border. The Chinese government, which had initially shown considerable caution, gave Pol Pot a triumphant welcome when he paid an official visit to Beijing in September. Furthermore, the treaty of friendship and co-operation which Vietnam signed with Laos on 18 June 1977 served to convince China that this was the first step towards the establishment of a Federation of Indochina. On 31 December relations between Hanoi and Phnom Penh were broken off; the Khmer Rouge had refused a Vietnamese offer to negotiate[42] and in addition, some very serious border incidents had taken place.

At the beginning of 1978 the outlook for negotiation and mediation seemed better; China sent Chou En-Lai's widow, Deng Yingchao as an emissary to Cambodia and the Vietnamese Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Phan Hien, visited Beijing.[43] However, these visits did not result in any agreement and the dispute between the two countries became even more serious when Vietnam hastened to enforce the measures it had been contemplating for some time against the Vietnamese overseas Chinese, the Hoa.

In March 1978 all private enterprise was forbidden in Vietnam; troops entered Cholon, the famous Chinese quarter of Ho Chi Minh City and the business people there had the choice, once all their belongings had been confiscated, to flee the country or be deported to the new economic zones.[44] And so, in the words of J.B. Cabestan describing the situation at the time, "Hanoi's policy together with the increasingly difficult living

[41] On the territorial and maritime disputes between China and Vietnam see also, François Joyaux, "La Chine, ses frontières et l'équilibre de l'Extrême-Orient" in P. de Beauregard et al., *op.cit.*, pp. 40-50. See also Martin H. Ketchen, "The Spratly Islands and the Law of the Sea: Dangerous Ground for Peace", *Asian Survey*, December 1977, Vol. XVII, no. 2, pp. 1167-1181.

[42] Leszek Buszynski, "Vietnam Confronts China," *Asian Survey*, vol. XX, no. 8, August 1980, page 934.

[43] *Ibid.*, page 834.

[44] *Far Eastern Economic Review*, page 834.

conditions experienced by the whole population are emptying the country of almost all its Chinese minority and also driving many Vietnamese into exile; 260,000 have taken refuge in China (of whom 30,000 are Vietnamese) and over a million, of whom seventy per cent are Chinese, have fled by sea (more than half these "boat people" have died at sea)."[45]

These draconian measures against the Chinese population in Vietnam were immediately treated by Beijing as an obvious provocation. China even went so far as to declare: "The Soviet Union is behind the expulsion of Chinese residents in Vietnam."[46] From that time on China became convinced that it could not accept such a serious humiliation, the effects of which were likely to be felt in all the states of Southeast Asia where there were large numbers of overseas Chinese.

China stopped its aid to Vietnam in April and in July, and on 1 July the Vietnamese consulates in Guangzhou (Canton), Nanning and Kumming were closed; the question of the overseas Chinese contributed to the rapid deterioration in relations between Beijing and Hanoi. At this point Vietnam aligned itself with the Soviet Union before embarking on its offensive in Kampuchea where it expected, as was noted above, that within several months it would have to contend with Chinese troops.

Caution and a Hard Line

From 17 February 1979, when China launched an attack across the border in the hope of teaching Vietnam "a lesson," right up to its current efforts to initiate a dialogue between the various Khmer factions, China has consistently pursued a policy which combines a cautious approach with inflexible demands.

China showed caution in the way it conducted the 1979 offensive against Vietnam. In announcing its intentions in advance, by means of Deng Xiaoping's remarks in both Washington and Tokyo, the Chinese

[45] Jean-Pierre Cabestan, "La politique de la Chine populaire à l'égard des Chinois d'outre-mer" in P. de Beauregard et al., *op.cit.*, page 105.

[46] Nguyen Manh Hung, *op.cit.*, page 1044.

government managed to assume a defensive posture by emphasizing that Vietnam had left it no option but to intervene with a punitive operation. In this way China gave the Soviet Union fair warning that it would be dangerous to intervene directly in this bilateral dispute, a dispute about which the US, the West and Japan had all been kept informed in a subtle way which somehow made it seem that they were in favour of China's actions.

On the battlefield Chinese troops were made unhappily aware of the obsolescence of both their tactics and their weapons. But by withdrawing their forces on 16 March, after a symbolic victory at Lang Son, China avoided the kind of escalation of the conflict which would have forced the Soviet Union to intervene directly. For their part, the Vietnamese showed considerable restraint in not ordering a general mobilization until 5 March and in delaying the transfer of their best divisions to the border area. Both countries also refrained from using their air forces for the duration of the conflict.

China abstained from giving Vietnam a "second lesson" in 1984 and 1985, after the Vietnamese offensive against the Khmer resistance movement in Kampuchea and Vietnam's incursions into Thailand. Once again Beijing's restraint was motivated not just by considerations of military weakness but also by its desire not to provoke a costly escalation of the conflict. On the one hand, China could not risk compromising its negotiations with the Soviet Union, and on the other, any renewed military action would have caused grave alarm among the members of ASEAN, most of which were only too ready to denounce Chinese ambitions in Southeast Asia.

If China seems to have lost several battles it has nonetheless no intention of losing the war, and the intransigence of its attitude to Hanoi is evidence of a strategy aimed at making Vietnam pay dearly for trying to maintain the status quo. The presence of a large number of Chinese troops just across the border and the fact that the Khmer Rouge faction of the CGDK is being supplied with arms, force Vietnam to maintain an expensive mobilization both on the border and in Kampuchea. The Chinese government also believes that the game is going in its favour and

that time will tell against the Vietnamese. The Chinese leaders are using — and will continue to use — the improvement in their relations with the Soviet Union to embarrass Vietnam. In going so far as to accept the Soviet military presence in Cam Ranh Bay and Danang, China, as we will see later, has reduced the game to its essentials, namely: "Vietnam must put an end to the invasion and withdraw all its troops from Kampuchea as quickly as possible; that is the key to the problem in Kampuchea".[47] This demand, repeated many times, that there be a complete and immediate withdrawal of Vietnamese forces, is not negotiable. As far as China is concerned, what is at stake is its credibility in the eyes of all of Southeast Asia; it is inconceivable that China would be willing to lose face by making any compromise on this point.

[47] *Beijing Information*, no. 40, 5 October 1987, page 18.

THE SOVIET UNION AND VIETNAM: A REALISTIC RELATIONSHIP

While the main antagonism, that between China and Vietnam, is intensified by their geographical proximity and the long history of conflict; relations between Vietnam and the Soviet Union are comparatively recent, dating only from the advent of socialism, and have been favourably affected by the two countries' converging interests. It is inevitable that a Hanoi-Moscow alliance would run counter to one between Hanoi and Beijing, even if the Vietnamese government has sometimes wished to treat both relationships as similar and equally harmonious. From 1975, and particularly since 1978, the Vietnamese leaders have been forced to bring their country into the Socialist Bloc. This choice affects their relations both with China and the West, and it enables the Soviet Union to play a strategic role in Southeast Asia. This new factor not only forces each of the countries in the area to rethink its strategy and reformulate its foreign policy, it also makes any negotiated settlement to the conflict in Indochina that much more difficult to achieve. This brief chapter is not intended to be a survey of all the factors which have led the Vietnamese leaders to make the decisions they did. Instead it raises some questions about the advantages and disadvantages each of the two countries involved, particularly the Soviet Union, has reaped from this strategic alliance. In view of the possibility of a rapprochement between the Soviet Union and China and improved prospects for a settlement in Kampuchea, it is worth asking just how long this "alliance" can carry on without running counter to the interests which gave rise to it in the first place.

Isolation and Necessity

The progressive deterioration in Sino-Vietnamese relations and the

muffled antagonism between Beijing and Hanoi, which became more severe after the Paris Agreements of 1973, took a new turn at the end of 1977, and again in May 1978, when China recalled more than a thousand engineers and specialists from Vietnam bringing a hundred aid projects to an abrupt end. By joining Comecon in June 1978, Vietnam — like Mongolia or Cuba — has allowed itself to come under the tutelage of an economic system which will replace the Chinese on all the projects the latter has abandoned and will tie the Vietnamese economy to that of the Eastern Bloc by means of a dozen agreements.

Did Vietnam have any choice? There is reason to believe that economic considerations were not the determining factor in Vietnam's decision to place itself under Soviet protection. The Vietnamese leaders must certainly have calculated that Soviet support would help Vietnam win recognition from China, ASEAN and the United States for its new status. By creating a *fait accompli* Vietnam to some extent set a trap for itself — a trap it was aware of but sure it could avoid. Exasperated by Chinese intransigence, Vietnam wanted to have its newly acquired regional importance recognised as quickly as possible and it believed that by allying itself with Moscow it would be accorded the respect it deserved in the wider context of East-West relations. In making this subtle calculation Hanoi may not have been sufficiently aware that this manoeuvre had been foreseen by the Soviet Union which, without ever restraining the Vietnamese leaders, nonetheless intended gradually to persuade them to adopt policies conducive to the long-term interests and objectives of Moscow.

As Thai Quang Trung pointed out:

> Moscow has only been interested in Vietnam since 1965 when Leonid Brezhnev realized all the advantages the Soviet Union would reap if the United States, after their failure in China and their traumatic experience in Korea, were to become embroiled in Asia once again. Because of this the Soviet Union supported North Vietnam in its attempt to conquer the South while managing to keep the dispute localized so that it did not adversely affect Soviet-US detente. The right hand was happy not to know what the left hand was doing. Vietnam became, in effect, the focal point of the confrontation between the two blocs. Its role was supposed to

be decisive in altering the international balance of power in favour of socialism.[48]

The author goes on to say that from 1975 the Soviet Union began to provide the Communist Party of Vietnam with the means to take over the South and assigned a variety of roles to a reunified Vietnam. Noteworthy among these was the task of counteracting China's influence in Southeast Asia and of being a naval staging base for the Soviet Union in Asia and the Pacific. Vietnam was also expected to act as an "outpost of socialism in Southeast Asia."[49]

On 3 November 1978, the Treaty of Friendship between Vietnam and the Soviet Union put into effect decisions taken earlier that year — particularly Vietnam's decision, made during the course of a "controversial meeting of the Politburo in June," to cast its lot unequivocally with the Soviet Union.[50] Observers were soon aware of what seemed to be a genuine military alliance. Article VI of this treaty laid down that "the two contracting parties will consult with each other about all important international problems which affect the interests of their two countries. In the event of one of the two being attacked or threatened both parties will consult each other immediately in order to eliminate the threat and to take what appropriate and effective measures are needed to ensure the peace and security of both countries."[51] The treaty may also have had a secret protocol authorizing the Soviet Union to intervene with its troops automatically in the event the Vietnamese government was overthrown by either a non-communist regime or one that was pro-Chinese.[52]

Whether or not any such protocol existed, Vietnam henceforth acted

[48] Thai Quang Trung, "Hanoi-Moscou: un couple inséparable", *La Nouvelle Asie*, F. Joyaux et P. Wajsman, Paris: Hachette, 1984, page 194.

[49] *Ibid.*, page 195.

[50] Thai Quang Trung, "The Moscow-Hanoi Axis and the Soviet Military Build-up in Southeast Asia," *Indochina Report*, no. 8, Singapore, October 1986, page 9.

[51] "Traité d'amitié et de coopération soviéto-vietnamien (3 novembre 1978)," reproduced as an appendix in *La Nouvelle Asie, op.cit.*, pages 436-439.

[52] Douglas Pike, *Vietnam and the Soviet Union. Anatomy of an Alliance*, Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1987, page 186.

with greater self-confidence. Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea and its subsequent direct confrontation with China were the two decisive situations in which each of the parties to the contract became aware of the interests and capacities of the other.

It seems that Soviet assistance played a significant part in Vietnam's invasion of Kampuchea. While it is true that this attack was mainly carried out by Vietnamese troops, there were indications that several Soviet advisors were present and that AN-12 transport planes with Soviet crews were used to supply Vietnamese troops on the ground. In addition, new missiles were put in place all along the frontier between China and Vietnam, particularly in the regions of Hongay, Lang Son and Cao Bang.[53]

Vietnam's open clash with China in February 1979 marked an even more crucial moment in its relations with the Soviet Union since it put article VI of the Friendship treaty to the test. Throughout the seventeen-day war, the Soviet Union acted with great caution although it steadfastly maintained that it intended to support its "ally." It set up a military airlift and, together with reconnaissance flights and numerous other signs, this showed the Chinese the limits beyond which they could not go. When questioned about this very important period in Vietnam's relations with Moscow, the Vietnamese to whom the author spoke in Hanoi confirmed that the Soviet Union had never been asked to intervene directly and that it had supplied all the help that had been asked for.[54] In view of the difficulties the Chinese troops soon encountered, there is reason to believe that the Vietnamese and the Soviets soon came to the conclusion that the attack could not last very long and that any direct intervention on the part of the Soviet Union was unnecessary. As far as the Vietnamese were concerned, this demonstration of their ability to deal with the Chinese forces on their own was the best possible proof that their confidence in their military skill and their attachment to their independence was justified.

[53] Thai Quang Trung, *op. cit.*, page 11, see also D. Pike *op. cit.*, pages 203-204.

[54] Interviews which the author had in Hanoi, July 1987.

PROFITS AND LOSSES

Vietnam, a past master in the art of manoeuvre on the field of battle and which now believed that it had won a fresh victory over China, was soon to find itself strategically isolated — a position from which the party to draw the greatest advantage would be the Soviet Union.

Since 1979 Vietnam has received $1.5 billion of military aid from the Soviet Bloc; this amounts to 43 percent of all the arms given to Third World countries in general.[55] It was also in 1979 that Soviet forces began to set up a base at Cam Ranh Bay, and on 27 March 1979 the first warships — a cruiser and two destroyers — arrived.[56] The Soviet Union could now project its power in Southeast Asia and even further afield.

The Soviet Navy, deployed at Cam Ranh Bay, Danang and Haiphong, has also been able to rely on the help of its airforce which could use the airports at Cam Ranh, Danang, Bien Hoa, and Tan Son Nhut. With the support of these bases the Soviet Union has been able for the first time to maintain a significant military presence in the area. These bases can service long-range patrol aircraft, and allow the use of electronic listening devices which enable the Soviets to keep an eye on the sea lanes; they can serve as ports of call for Soviet submarines and have the necessary installations required for storing air-to-surface missiles. Moreover Danang and Cam Ranh are important staging points for the Soviet Navy as well as for its merchant shipping, en route between Vladivostok and the Indian Ocean.[57]

The Soviet Union has also been successful in its economic relations with Vietnam. By integrating the Vietnamese economy with that of the Eastern Bloc, Moscow persuaded Vietnam not to follow the Chinese

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[55] Leszek Buszynski, *Soviet Foreign Policy and Southeast Asia*, London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1986, page 184.

[56] The Vietnamese leaders refuse to use the term "base" and prefer to speak of port "facilities" granted to the Soviet Union. One of those the author interviewed in Hanoi said that neither Cam Ranh Bay or Danang had any sort of extra-territorial status.

[57] On Soviet military capacity in Vietnam see the very detailed study by Thai Quang Trung in *Indochina Report, op.cit.*

model; it guaranteed that it would provide Vietnam with the products to which it did not have easy access and thereby strengthened its own political and military influence over the country. Here again the increase in economic assistance only came after the decisive events of 1978 and 1979.

In June and July 1981 several economic agreements were signed in Moscow. Soviet aid rose to US $2 billion per year (forty percent in the military sector and sixty percent for the economy in general).[58] On 19 June a very important agreement was signed dealing with the production of offshore gas and oil; mines, electricity, transport and indeed all the vital sectors of Vietnam's economy have benefitted from Soviet economic aid. The July agreements, which set up the third Five Year Plan (1981-1985) involved aid valued at US $6.525 billion. This figure is based on a Soviet calculation, according to which the aid for that period was 350 percent greater than that for the period 1975-1980.[59]

On 31 October 1983, under the terms of the new accords, the Vietnamese agreed to increase their production of tropical fruits, vegetables, coffee, tea, tobacco and rubber in order to meet Soviet demands. It thus became very difficult for Vietnam to alter the type or destination of its exports once these structures were put in place. It is worth noting that whereas in 1980, Vietnamese trade with the Soviet Bloc amounted to seventy-seven percent of its trade, by 1983 this had risen to ninety percent.[60]

These few facts, which are examined in great detail in various other studies,[61] are evidence of a takeover and indicative of the important role

[58] Martial Dassé, "Le Vietnam dans la 3e guerre d'Indochine," *Défense nationale*, vol. 40 Paris, November 1984, page 115.

[59] See the article by Vo Nhan Tri, "Soviet-Vietnamese Economic Co-operation since 1975," in *Indochina Report*, no. 8, Singapore, October 1986, pp. 38-71.

[60] Leszek Buszynski, *op.cit.*, page 186.

[61] Among the articles on this subject the following are worth consulting "Le Vietnam dix ans après: bilan et perspectives," *Problèmes politiques et sociaux*, 7 mars 1986; La Documentation française, Paris; Vo Nhan Tri, "Vietnam: The Third Five Year Plan 1981-1985. Performance and Limits," *Indochina Report*, no. 4, Singapore, October-December 1985. On the deployment of Soviet military at Cam Ranh Bay and Danang, see the very good brief account in the *Asia Yearbook 1983*, Hong Kong: F.E.E.R., pages 22-26.

which Vietnam would henceforth play in Soviet strategy. Its importance is all the more evident because the costs to the USSR of maintaining this situation are considerable; however, these costs are minimal if one remembers that the Soviet Union is enjoying its first great success in Asia since 1945.

It is estimated that it costs the Soviet Union between four and six billion US dollars a year to provide this support to Vietnam. In 1986 it was estimated that the war in Kampuchea was costing Vietnam US $12 million a day; the Soviet Union was directly or indirectly responsible for eighty percent of this expenditure. Military equipment provided to Kampuchea by the Soviet Union increased by 500 percent between 1980 and 1984. The total cost of the military aid provided by the Soviet Union to Vietnam has risen from US $44.7 million in 1976 to around 1.5 billion in 1986.[62]

Any analysis of this expenditure would seem to confirm the importance which the Soviet Union attaches to Vietnam, particularly if one remembers that there are also political costs to be paid. The alliance with Hanoi has made it much more difficult for the Soviet Union to achieve the rapprochement it seeks with China. While it has taken care never to provoke the Chinese leaders, the Soviet Union is now suspected of playing a double game, which the Chinese in turn try to use to their advantage in the dispute with Vietnam.

The Soviet Union also runs the risk of provoking serious resentment on the part of other countries in the area, particularly the members of ASEAN. For example, the fact that it supported Hanoi in denying the existence of the refugee problem in 1979 and 1980, has done nothing to improve the Soviet image internationally. In June 1980 Moscow Radio declared that any objective analysis of the position of the refugees "proves that the governments of Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea have nothing to do with the problem of refugees. The problem was invented in Washington and Beijing to promote their own political designs."[63] That

[62] Douglas Pike, *op. cit.*, pages 196, 210, 227.

[63] *Ibid.*, page 212.

same month, even though the Soviet leaders had assured President Carter at the end of December 1979 that Vietnam would not cross the border into Thailand, Vietnamese troops crossed the Thai-Cambodian border to attack the refugee camps, and also, no doubt, to show that they could act independently of Moscow.[64] From the perspective of the states of Southeast Asia, incidents of that kind illustrate not only the duplicity of the Soviet Union but also the difficulty of knowing whether or not Hanoi is acting on directives from Moscow.

GORBACHEV'S EFFECT ON THE CONFLICT IN INDOCHINA

It would be premature to maintain that the advent of a new General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party in 1985 has led to new objectives being pursued in Indochina. Here, as with other areas and issues, the difference is more one of form and of greater flexibility, and of the need for the Soviet Union to promote a climate in foreign affairs conducive to the far reaching reforms it hopes to carry out at home. There is no change in the strategic importance which the Soviet Union attaches to Vietnam, but it has tried to consolidate Vietnam's membership in Comecon in such a way that Vietnamese production will more adequately compensate for Soviet expenditures, while avoiding waste and the use of economic aid for military purposes.

As for Kampuchea, the Soviet Union is carrying on more intensive negotiations with China, in an effort to reduce the antagonism between Hanoi and Beijing — essential for any solution. Moscow has not, however, abandoned its original position. It continues to support Vietnam in arguing that the situation in Kampuchea is the result of meddling by China, ASEAN and the United States, that the whole conflict must be settled through negotiation, and that any solution must involve the continued existence of the Heng Samrin regime, though possibly reorganised in the form of a coalition which includes other Khmer factions. It also supports the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops in 1990, or even earlier if a satisfactory settlement is reached, and proposes its good offices in the conduct of such negotiations and in guaranteeing an eventual agreement.

[64] *Ibid.*, page 208.

On 28 July 1986, the General Secretary gave an important speech in Vladivostok dealing with Asia and the Pacific in which he only mentioned Indochina in passing, noting that everything depended on restoring normal relations between Vietnam and China. Gorbachev went on to say: "This is the sovereign affair of the government and leadership of the two countries. We can only express our interest in seeing the border between these socialist states again become a border of peace and good neighbourliness, in seeing a comradely dialogue resumed and unnecessary suspicions and distrust removed."[65]

On the other hand, on 8 January 1986, before Gorbachev had made this comment, Michael Kapitsa, a Kremlin specialist on Asia and the Pacific, had spoken in Moscow of a formula for bringing about a settlement in Kampuchea. He foresaw "elections in which foreign observers would take part, followed by a conference which would be attended by the three states in Indochina, the five permanent members of the Security Council, the ASEAN countries, India, and possibly Australia and Sweden."[66] On 22 January China rejected this Soviet proposal maintaining that "the key to the problem of Kampuchea [lies in] the withdrawal of all Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea."[67]

This intervention on the part of China served to emphasize its essential role in any peace initiative, and also reminded the Soviet Union that another major hurdle to be cleared in restoring normal relations between the Soviet Union and China continued to be the withdrawal of the Vietnamese forces from Kampuchea. For the Soviets, who have been actively pursuing a rapprochement with China ever since Brezhnev's speech in Tashkent in March 1982, the link between an improvement in Sino-Soviet relations and the reduction of tension between China and Vietnam is of particular importance. Moscow takes great care, however, never to upset Hanoi, by always stating after each meeting with the Chinese that any improvement in its relations with the latter must not be achieved at the expense of a third country.

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[65] *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. XXXVIII, no. 30, 27 August 1986, page 8.

[66] *Le Monde*, 10 January 1986, page 1.

[67] *Le Monde*, 24 January 1986, page 4.

Officially, the Vietnamese leaders are delighted by the improvement in Sino-Soviet relations. As early as 1982 the Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Nguyen Co Thach, said in Bangkok: "We welcome detente between China and the Soviet Union because this shows that the policy of collusion between the US and China has failed."[68] This official optimism was repeated many times in the course of various interviews in Hanoi. Sometimes, however, those interviewed spoke of the Soviet Union as having little room for manoeuvre if it did not want to give up the strategic advantages acquired so painstakingly in Vietnam. This realism on the part of the Vietnamese was confirmed by the Director of the Institute for Oriental Studies in Moscow who said: "Vietnam is as important to us as West Germany is to the United States."[69]

Nonetheless the Vietnamese continue to be somewhat perplexed, and their traditional feelings of resentment toward the Soviet Union have not entirely disappeared despite official Socialist "brotherhood." The Vietnamese are afraid of any Sino-Soviet collusion on a solution to the problem in Kampuchea which would be more of an advantage to China and the Soviet Union than to Vietnam. Vietnam has never forgotten the alliance between the Soviet Union and China during the Geneva Conference of 1954.

[68] Leszek Buszynski, *op.cit.*, page 192.

[69] Thai Quang Trung in *Indochina Report*, *op.cit.*, page 30.

NECESSARY BUT UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPTS AT MEDIATION

Since 1978, strange things have been happening in Indochina; the number of actors involved continues to increase; would-be mediators vie with each other in their attempts to produce a settlement and everyone takes part in similar dialogues which are conducted in a sort of code so as to disguise their real intentions.

Since the Vietnamese invaded Kampuchea, each year has seen a new crop of peace proposals but as yet none of these has produced any tangible results. From time to time there has seemed to be some hope of success, but this has never lasted in the face of the intransigence of the parties directly involved. Since the middle of 1985, and more particularly since the beginning of 1986, there have been more specific proposals which may have spurred the antagonists on to greater efforts. In the next chapter we will deal at some length with the reasons for this new situation and the possible developments which may arise from it.

Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to begin with a brief analysis of the way in which the earlier period led to a complete deadlock. In this initial stage of the conflict ASEAN and Vietnam vied with each other in proposing solutions. From the very beginning ASEAN has tried to have the conflict dealt with in the international arena, whereas Vietnam has wanted to keep it a purely regional matter. While they use quite different strategies, both sides pursue very similar aims, since for each of them the ultimate objective is to gain time, so as to win the battle in the field.

With these as starting points it is possible to give a better account of the reason for the total deadlock which lasted until 1985.

- Since 1983, Vietnam, while continuing to put forward conciliatory proposals, has launched large-scale military operations every dry season, in an attempt to destroy the Kampuchean rebels.

- For their part, ASEAN and particularly China have tried to force the Vietnamese troops to withdraw from Kampuchea by creating the CGDK in June 1982 and helping it conduct successful military operations.

- On a diplomatic level ASEAN and CGDK have put forward numerous proposals for a settlement in the hopes of retaining the initiative and above all in an effort to keep their fragile coalition from coming apart at the seams.

- Vietnam remains intransigent and continues to fall back on the decisions of the Conference of the three Indochinese states (Laos, Vietnam, Kampuchea), and is convinced that ASEAN is not a group capable of playing a part in any eventual settlement and it believes it can promote dissension within the Coalition as well as in the CGDK.

- Vietnam has been in favour of mediation by countries such as Indonesia, Australia and Japan in the hopes of obtaining the objective noted above, as well as having its presence in Kampuchea accepted as a *fait accompli.*

- The two principal actors who could exert an influence on these antagonists have voluntarily kept out of the diplomatic manoeuvering, since each one prefers to pursue its own interests. As far as the Soviet Union is concerned its aim is to continue supporting Vietnam and to profit from the political and military advantages of having the latter dependent upon it. For China, on the other hand, the principle objective is to make Vietnam pay dearly for the humiliation Beijing suffered by supporting the Khmer Rouge, and to isolate Vietnam economically.

THE TIME FACTOR AND A HARD LINE

The United Nations is the forum where ASEAN continues to gain its most tangible victory. Every autumn since 1979 the Association has sponsored a resolution calling for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Kampuchea, the restoration of Kampuchea's independence, the right of its people to self-determination, and an undertaking by all the other countries in the region not to interfere in the internal affairs of Kampuchea. In 1979, ninety-one countries voted in favour of this resolution and twenty-one against;[70] in 1987 one hundred and seventeen voted in favour and twenty-one against.[71]

Although every year ASEAN receives increased votes in favour of its resolution it has never obtained the definitive support it hoped for. In July 1981, for instance, ASEAN thought it had succeeded by having a large-scale international conference on the subject of Kampuchea take place in New York. Despite the refusal of Vietnam, the Soviet Union and many other East Bloc countries to attend, ninety-three countries took part. ASEAN did not succeed, however, in getting a resolution adopted which called for the disarmament, under UN supervision, of all the Cambodian factions, the withdrawal of the Vietnamese forces and the holding of free elections.[72] China was strongly opposed to disarming the Khmer Rouge or to any encroachment on the sovereignty of Democratic Kampuchea — the only regime recognized by the United Nations. By supporting China, the United States, to the great displeasure of ASEAN, made China an essential participant in any eventual settlement of the conflict in Indochina.

In September 1983, the five members of ASEAN simultaneously launched a joint appeal for the independence of Kampuchea.[73] The Association referred to the will of the international community and called for a phased withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops. The whole

[70] See *ASEAN Newsletter*, no. 17, September-October 1986, page 8.

[71] *The New York Times*, 15 October 1987, page A5.

[72] On the 1981 Conference on Kampuchea see for example Justus M. Van der Kroef, "Dynamics of the Cambodian Conflict," *Conflict Studies*, no. 183, London 1986.

[73] BBC, *Summary of World Broadcast (SWB)*, 23 September 1983, page A3/1.

operation was to be carried out with the help of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, and UN peacekeeping forces would ensure that the cease-fire was respected. The communiqué insisted once again that an "International Conference on the reconstruction of Kampuchea should be organized in appropriate time."[74] This proposal contained all the necessary elements to ensure its immediate rejection by Vietnam which was resolutely opposed to any UN intervention in Kampuchea.

A few months before, at the Seventh Conference of the Non-aligned Nations in New Delhi, ASEAN had tested the waters once again by putting forward a new formula for settlement. This initiative came from the Malaysian Foreign Minister, Ghazali Shafie, who was in agreement with his Vietnamese counterpart, Nguyen Co Thach, on the so-called "five plus two" proposal calling for direct contacts between the five ASEAN countries and Vietnam and Laos.[75] The two ministers had agreed to omit any mention of Khmer participation in this proposed encounter. In July, the Heng Samrin government of the People's Republic of Kampuchea accepted this formula and at the beginning of 1984 the Indochinese Foreign Ministers' Conference meeting in Vientiane also accepted the "five plus two" formula while agreeing that China should also take part.

This last concession came too late, however, since China had already abandoned the idea some time before and made it clear that it did not recognize the right of the international community, as expressed in the 1981 Conference, to meddle with events in Kampuchea; above all, China did not want to have the regime in Phnom Penh given de facto recognition by ASEAN. Thus ASEAN found itself called to order by China when it tried to put forward a regional solution to the conflict. Moreover, both Thailand and the Philippines, neither of which were members of the non-aligned group and therefore had not been adequately consulted about the Malaysian initiative, joined China in rejecting the "five plus two" formula, as, not surprisingly, did the CGDK.

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] Justus M. Van der Kroef, "Kampuchea: The Road to Finlandization, 1983," *Asian Profile*, vol. 13, no. 3, June 1985, page 228.

This episode, along with many others, illustrates the setbacks experienced by ASEAN and the pressures to which it is subject. The Association, which is inherently unstable, most frequently divides into two factions, one supports a hard line toward Vietnam (Singapore and Thailand), and the other (Indonesia and Malaysia) is more willing to negotiate. To make things even more difficult, the Association has to manoeuvre in such a way that it does not find itself opposed to China while continuing to pay lip service to the fictitious unity of the CGDK in which the Khmer Rouge faction is completely under the control of Beijing. In view of all this it is not hard to understand why Vietnam has never ceased to believe that it can quickly bring about the collapse of the whole alliance. The paradox, indeed the irony of this strategy, is that it has backfired against Hanoi, which has been too confident that time was in its favour.

By encouraging Indonesia to play the role of dissident in the Association (as we will see later) and by bringing in external mediators such as Japan and India and particularly Australia, Vietnam has become more self-confident in the field of diplomacy. It has tried to make the most of its advantages by launching three offensives[76] in an attempt to impose a military solution on Kampuchea. In the spring of 1985 Vietnam was very optimistic; China had taken no action and the "second lesson" which it had promised to teach Vietnam never materialized. The Vietnamese troops had occupied fifteen of the CGDK resistance camps and were successfully sealing off the frontier between Kampuchea and Thailand.[77] In April the Vietnamese Minister for Foreign Affairs confirmed this optimism by declaring that Vietnam would withdraw its troops from Kampuchea in 1995; a few months later on 16 August, during the Indochinese Foreign Ministers' conference, it was announced that the Vietnamese troops would be withdrawn in 1990.[78]

However, neither the Vietnamese confidence nor the defeats inflicted

[76] In January 1983, for four months, in June 1984 and especially the third major offensive from December 1984 to March 1985.

[77] For discussion of the Vietnamese military operations it is interesting to read the article by Elisabeth Becker, "Stalemate in Cambodia," *Current History*, April 1987, pages 156, 180-186.

[78] *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 21 August 1985.

on the CGDK resistance led to its collapse or to any weakening in the resolve of ASEAN or China. After having devoted a lot of resources and diplomatic activity to this policy Vietnam found itself right back in a position every bit as difficult as that in early 1983.

In April 1985 Indonesia and Malaysia, this time with the backing of their partners in ASEAN, made a proposal to Hanoi about what they called "proximity talks."[79] This envisaged using ASEAN as an intermediary to put the Heng Samrin government in touch with representatives of the CGDK. On 30 April, Indonesia also suggested that it should intervene to restore normal relations between the United States and Vietnam. This idea was approved by China, and on 3 May the Soviet Union agreed to serve as an intermediary and transmit to Vietnam proposals concerning proximity talks.[80]

In response to objections by both China and the US the procedures for the proposed negotiations were modified so as not to involve any recognition of the government in Phnom Penh. After various consultations Thailand proposed a formula for indirect "proximity talks" between, on the one hand, one member of the CGDK recognized by the UN, and, on the other, representatives of the Heng Samrin regime who would form part of a Vietnamese delegation. This was rejected by both Hanoi and Phnom Penh, but it was nonetheless brought forward again in the communiqué issued by the Indochinese Foreign Ministers after their meeting in August 1985. The communiqué maintained that the proposal was worth considering and also added that the People's Republic of Kampuchea was willing to meet the Khmer opposition groups, in other words the CGDK.[81]

Thus the three states in Indochina had reverted to the initial idea of "proximity talks"; the notion of direct contacts between the different Cambodian factions was gaining ground. In addition, ASEAN had agreed to mention Heng Samrin by name for the first time and the Soviet

[79] "ASEAN adopts formula for proximity talks," *SWB*, 30 May 1985, page i.

[80] "Soviet mediation on Cambodia," *SWB*, 3 May 1985, page i.

[81] Justus M. Van der Kroef, "Dynamics of the Cambodian Conflict," *op.cit.*, page 9.

Union had also made it clear that it intended to see the conflict brought to an end.

Controversial Attempts at Mediation

One cannot conclude any analysis of this important phase of the conflict in Indochina without referring, albeit briefly, to those who have tried to revive negotiations between the principal opponents. Many states have intervened; India, France and even Romania have either taken the initiative or else been asked to involve themselves, but these attempts have never lasted very long. Three other interventions, however, have been of greater significance — those of Japan, Australia and Indonesia. All three are worth a brief mention ending with the most important one, that of Indonesia.

This is not the place to attempt a detailed analysis of the deeper motives which lie behind these diplomatic initiatives, since they originate in the complex nature of three quite different foreign policies. It is worth noting, however, at the risk of over simplification, that Japan has always believed that it can keep political issues distinct from economic considerations in its conduct of foreign affairs in Asia. Indonesia has always seen the influence of China as more of a threat than that of Vietnam. And as for Australia, since the Labour Party came to power in March 1983, Australia has tried to work out a foreign policy which attaches regional priority to Asia but at the same time reflects a change in its ideological approach.

In July 1984, after consulting the leaders of ASEAN, the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs proposed that the conflict in Kampuchea be dealt with in three phases. Shintaro Abe suggested that first of all the Vietnamese troops should withdraw; second, withdrawal would be followed by free elections under the supervision of an international peacekeeping force; and finally, a large-scale international aid programme should be set up to provide the three states in Indochina with economic and financial assistance.[82] Japan declared itself ready to play an active role in this process if the proposal was accepted.

[82] Justus M. Van der Kroef, "The Kampuchean Conflict: Edging Toward Compromise?" *Asian Affairs*, vol. 12 no. 1, Spring 1985, page 15.

Vietnam and the PRK immediately rejected the Japanese offer which they described as being "coercive" and closely tied to Japan's economic strategy. A few months later, however, on 12 September 1984, in an interview with the correspondent for the *Kyodo News Service*, the Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Nguyen Co Thach, mentioned that henceforth Vietnam would be willing to accept an international peacekeeping force and that it would view Japan favourably as a mediator. The following month, talks in Hanoi between Thach and Abe rapidly put an end to the hopes which had arisen from this Japanese attempt at mediation. The Vietnamese government fell back on its previous intransigent position by refusing to allow the Khmer factions a part in any international conference and insisting that demilitarized zones be established on both sides of the border between Thailand and Kampuchea. The Vietnamese Minister also proposed that an international conference be held which would be attended by the six members of ASEAN, the three states in Indochina, the United States, China, the Soviet Union, Britain, France, and India. Nguyen Co Thach made it clear, to those who questioned him on this point, that if Japan wished to take part in an international conference on Kampuchea it would have to distance itself from the positions taken by ASEAN and China.[83]

The Japanese were bitterly disappointed since they felt that Hanoi had made use of Tokyo's intervention to gain time and take the opportunity to reiterate the points on which it was not willing to yield. In other words, Vietnam had shown that the level of importance it attached to the security of Kampuchea could not change even by the attractive possibility of obtaining from Japan the economic and financial aid it so desperately needed.

The most controversial intervention at this time was that of Australia. When the Labour Party came to power in March 1983, the Hawke government wished to show that Australia was a natural part of Southeast Asia; this led it to take a more active part in negotiations concerning the conflict in Kampuchea.[84] The Vietnamese government

[83] *Ibid.* page 16 and 18.

[84] See E.M. Andrews, "Problems in Australian Foreign Policy, January-June 1985," *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Summer 1985, page 389.

soon realized the advantages it could reap from having Australia take on the role of "honest broker." The ASEAN countries, on the other hand, showed considerable reservations about Australia's intentions when the latter made them known in Manila at the ASEAN ministerial meeting in April 1983.

In October 1983, when Australia announced that it would no longer be a co-sponsor of the annual ASEAN resolution at the UN and that it would abstain from condemning the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea, ASEAN's misgivings rapidly turned to hostility.[85] Throughout 1984 Australia spared no efforts in an attempt to establish its credibility. The visit to Canberra in March 1984 of the Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Nguyen Co Thach, confirmed the fact that Australia had begun to play a significant part in the progress of negotiation. Hanoi was obviously delighted to move the diplomatic struggle, in which it was both an actor and a target, onto new ground, and was well aware of the advantages to be gained by weakening the solidarity of the Western coalition which had been so vociferous in condemning its presence in Kampuchea.

In July, when he was in Jakarta, the Australian Foreign Minister, William Hayden, surprised everyone by proposing that a conference on Kampuchea be held by the ASEAN countries, Vietnam and Laos. Before there was time to discover whether this project had been agreed to by Hanoi and discussed during Nguyen Co Thach's visit to Canberra, ASEAN quickly rejected the proposal making it clear that: 1) any negotiations between ASEAN and Indochina would be useless until such time as an agreement had been reached about the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops from Laos, and 2) that such negotiations would enable Hanoi to exploit the situation so as to obtain recognition for the Heng Samrin regime.[86]

The beginning of 1985 witnessed several incidents indicative of the role Australia would have played had such an international conference

[85] H.S. Leng and S. Silwood, "Australia and the Kampuchea Crisis," *Australia Outlook*, vol. 40 no. 2, August 1986, page 102.

[86] Justus M. Van der Kroef, "The Kampuchean Conflict: Edging Toward Compromise?" *op.cit.*, page 11.

taken place. The visit of the UN Secretary General in February and the time spent by Prince Sihanouk in Australia were indications of the diplomatic bargaining which was going on. The visit to Vietnam in March of the Australian Foreign Minister, William Hayden, was part of these transactions but this provoked so much controversy that it led to a notable slackening in Australia's diplomatic efforts.[87] As it happened, Hayden's visit coincided almost exactly with the most serious Vietnamese attacks to date, which the latter launched as part of its 1985 major offensive against the Khmer resistance camps; in addition, Hayden met Hun Sen, the Foreign Minister for the Heng Samrin regime during his visit to Ho Chi Minh City. This meeting was thereafter interpreted as implying recognition of the Phnom Penh regime — quite unacceptable as far as ASEAN was concerned. Indeed, all the Australian initiatives aroused misgivings and opposition, particularly on the part of Indonesia which had seen itself from the very beginning as the power best suited to serve as an intermediary with Vietnam.

From 1984 the contacts which had already been established between Vietnam and Indonesia became more frequent and sometimes produced remarkable results. The most controversial incident occurred when Benny Murdani, the Commander of the Indonesian Armed Forces declared, after his visit to Hanoi in February 1984, that the Indonesian army and the Indonesian people did not look upon Vietnam as the greatest threat to Southeast Asia.[88] As far as could be told, this statement, which was considered provocative, particularly by the other members of ASEAN, implied that Indonesia, which had not had diplomatic relations with China since 1965, considered the latter to be a greater threat to the area than Vietnam. Indonesia tried — and continues to try — to take initiatives which will encourage the other members of ASEAN to moderate their extreme position and show greater understanding of Vietnamese nationalism and Vietnam's concerns about its own security. Indonesia also insists on the need to give up applying useless sanctions to Vietnam.

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[87] H.S. Leng and S. Silwood, *op.cit.*, pages 103-104.

[88] On Indonesia's policy towards Vietnam see the very well documented article by Andrew J. MacIntyre, "Interpreting Indonesian Foreign Policy. The Case of Kampuchea 1979-1986," *Asian Survey*, vol. 27, no. 5, May 1987, pages 515-534.

On many occasions, joint seminars held by the Vietnamese Institute for International Relations and the Centre for International and Strategic studies in Jakarta have contributed, as did the visit of Nguyen Co Thach to Indonesia in March 1984, to establishing contacts between the two countries; these are viewed by others with great suspicion. The Vietnamese have also tried at various times to get the Indonesians to adopt positions similar to their own and this has sometimes caused the latter obvious embarrassment. This was the case when Nguyen Co Thach declared at the close of his visit to Jakarta that "the long-range threat to Southeast Asia is China and [we] must work together to meet the long-range threat."[89] President Suharto of Indonesia was forced to declare publicly that this was in fact a manoeuvre to create dissension within ASEAN.

Thus, for quite different reasons, none of these three attempts at mediation has produced any tangible results. All of them have given rise to controversy and have been subject to manipulation by the Vietnamese leaders. These attempts have been made by countries whose interests were too peripheral compared to those really involved in the conflict. They had no hope of succeeding without the support of either China or the Soviet Union, the only outsiders who have real influence.

[89] Leszek Buszynski, "Vietnam's Asean Diplomacy: The Assertion of a Fait Accompli," *The World Today*, vol. 42, no. 4, April 1986, page 65.

FRESH HOPES FOR PEACE

Perhaps it is illusory to believe that one can achieve a real state of peace in the peninsula of Indochina. It might be fairer, and certainly more realistic, to envisage a solution to the present conflict which would involve shaky compromises but could never succeed in eliminating all the fighting or calming all the passions.

The situation has changed recently, and the great flurry of diplomatic activity going on is an indication of the fact that present circumstances are more propitious for reaching a settlement than ever before. Before concluding, however, that this process is irreversible it is necessary to recognize that from now on any such settlement is likely to depend on the progress of the rapprochement between the Soviet Union and China. Vietnam is undeniably in an increasingly delicate situation, even if it officially welcomes this process, for the change which is taking place will force it to develop policies towards Moscow and Beijing which are firm and yet conciliatory. The ambiguity and caution implicit in Vietnam's relations with these two capitals are nothing new. The current situation differs from any previous one, however, because Vietnam is much more dependent on Moscow, and its relations with China are much more strained as a result of the humiliations China suffered — humiliations for which it is not willing to forgive Hanoi unless the latter makes some concessions.

The Development of a Rapprochement Between China and the Soviet Union

In April 1985 the Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Nguyen Co Thach,

commented with great shrewdness on the thaw which was taking place in Sino-Soviet relations. He said that one must wait and see how this was translated into action and added:

> We have had experience with the Chinese. When you go to the circus you shouldn't pay too much attention to the hand the magician waves about. What you should watch is the one he doesn't move. It is the same with China. One should not pay too much attention to what is said but rather to the things which are not said. We are well aware that the thaw in Sino-Soviet relations will create a good atmosphere for international relations and that includes Southeast Asia.[90]

On the question of a possible settlement, the Minister pointed out that throughout the whole of its history the fate of Indochina has been decided on the battlefield and not by the great powers. "The second factor," he said, "is that we are independent."[91]

This remark underlines two essential elements in Vietnamese policy to which they continue to be attached; it may also show that they retain certain illusions and have failed to adapt to changing circumstances. Certainly in April 1985 Vietnam emerged as the victor and was full of self-confidence after its major offensive against the resistance camps in Kampuchea. This enabled it to announce that its forces would unilaterally withdraw from Kampuchea in 1990. It also felt confident enough to dictate the conditions for a settlement, using the Kampuchean Foreign Minister, Hun Sen, as an intermediary to pass this on to his Australian counterpart, William Hayden, when he met the latter in Ho Chi Minh City, on 8 March 1985.

Among the proposed conditions were the following:

- the complete withdrawal of the Vietnamese forces once Pol Pot had been eliminated;
- the holding of "free elections" in accordance with the

[90] *Le Monde*, 6 April 1985, page 4.
[91] *Ibid.*

constitution of the People's Republic of Kampuchea (PRK). A certain number of individuals (such as Sihanouk and Son Sann) would be able to take part in these elections provided they had disassociated themselves from Pol Pot, but only the Communist Party would participate as a party;

- There would be no further use of Thai territory and with this in mind an international conference on Southeast Asia would be held in Canberra;

- There would be an end to any meddling in the conflict by countries outside the region (including China and the United States);

- The international community would guarantee this settlement of the conflict in Cambodia.[92]

In mid-June the Vietnamese Minister for Foreign Affairs reiterated these demands with the same intransigence in an interview with the newspaper *Quan Dhoi Nhan Dan*.[93] In the meantime, ASEAN had, in April, put forward the idea of "proximity talks"[94] which had the attraction of involving direct negotiations between Cambodians of different factions and ideological tendencies. This idea of holding talks between the Cambodians themselves was not new. It had already been proposed by Prince Sihanouk at the beginning of 1984 when he suggested holding a meeting with the leaders of the PRK, and in September President Heng Samrin had responded positively to the idea of meeting Sihanouk in Paris. At the time, however, pressure on the part of the Chinese and the hostility of the two "allies" of the CGDK had prevented this project from being carried out and once again Prince Sihanouk had threatened to resign.[95]

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[92] Karl D. Jackson, "Indochina, 1982-1985: Peace Yields To War," in Richard H. Solomon and Masataka Kosaka (eds.), *The Soviet Far East Military Buildup, Nuclear Dilemmas and Asian Security*, Dover, Mass.: Auburn House Pub. Company, 1986, page 198.

[93] *SWB*, FE/7984/A3/3, 22 June 1985.

[94] See the previous chapter.

[95] Nayan Chanda, "Cambodia: Sihanouk Stonewalled," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, November 1985, page 4.

Now the situation was different. There had been numerous developments concerning various aspects of the conflict but perhaps the most important of all was the appointment of Mikhail Gorbachev in March 1985 as leader of the Soviet Communist Party. The advent of a new General Secretary, while it did not radically change a tide which had already begun to flow, would nevertheless have a gradual effect on Soviet policy in East Asia. It seems probable, though it would be hard to prove, that from the spring of 1985 the Sino-Soviet rapprochement had a definite effect on the attitudes of the three members of the Soviet Union-China-Vietnam triangle. The year 1985 was notable for "the new Soviet diplomatic offensive" in Southeast Asia and, to quote the title of an article in *Le Monde*, "For China, 1985 will have been the year of the Soviet Union."[96]

It is worth recalling several events which took place at that time. First of all, in March, Mikhail Kapitsa, the Soviet Union's Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs in charge of Asia, made a month-long tour of the region. Everywhere he went, and particularly in Beijing, he maintained that Moscow intended to act as a guarantor of the peace in Southeast Asia.[97] Then on 17 April, Deng Xiaoping declared that the Soviet Union could keep its bases in Vietnam provided the Vietnamese troops were withdrawn from Kampuchea.[98] At the beginning of May the Soviet Union agreed to act as an intermediary between ASEAN and Vietnam to transmit the former's proposal concerning the "proximity talks."[99]

Were these incidents signs that the Soviet Union was putting pressure on the Vietnamese leaders or were they, rather, a reflection of the fact that the Vietnamese had realized that they would have to be more flexible in view of the improved relations between Moscow and Beijing? While it is difficult to give any definite reply to this question it is worth noting that on 17 July 1985 the Vietnamese ambassador in Bangkok expressed a new attitude concerning the "proximity talks": "Prince

[96] *Le Monde*, 20 December 1985, page 4.

[97] *Ibid.*, page 1.

[98] Gregory D. Knight, "China's Soviet Policy in the Gorbachev Era," *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 9, no. 2, Spring 1986, page 101.

[99] *SWB*, FE/7941/i; 3 May 1985.

Sihanouk had better ask to see Mr. Hun Sen and not foreign Minister Thach. I think if the Prince sought to do so, Phnom Penh would probably agree to a meeting."[100]

A few days later it was the turn of Prime Minister Hun Sen (he retained his portfolio as Foreign Minister) to elaborate his position in an interview with a Thai newspaper:

> We did not have a policy of collaborating with Sihanouk before. But now that we have destroyed Pol Pot's military bases, we feel that we are strong enough to talk about national reconstruction and unification of all Cambodians, regardless of the fact that Sihanouk has never once co-operated with us. We never think we have any problem with Sihanouk. Sihanouk can return to Cambodia immediately — tomorrow, if today he shakes off his ties with Pol Pot — so that he can prepare for the general elections.[101]

On 16 August 1985 the communiqué issued at the close of the Indochinese Foreign Ministers' Conference stated that the Vietnamese troops would be withdrawn from Kampuchea in 1990 and that the Government in Phnom Penh was ready to enter into negotiations with the various Khmer groups and individuals which were opposed to it, in order to discuss a process of national reconciliation based on the elimination of the Pol Pot clique.[102]

Finally on 2 September, the Khmer Rouge radio, the Voice of Democratic Kampuchea, announced that Son Sen would replace Pol Pot as commander in chief of the national army of Democratic Kampuchea.[103] The disappearance of Pol Pot came at a most opportune moment since it removed an obstacle to the negotiating process which had been under discussion for several months. One cannot dismiss the possibility that Beijing engineered this fortunate occurrence as part of its reciprocal concessions with the Soviet Union.

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[100] *SWB*, FE/8007/A3/1. 19 July 1985.
[101] *SWB*, FE/8009/A3/4. 22 July 1985.
[102] *Le Monde*, 17 August 1985, page 5.
[103] *Ibid.*, 3 September 1985, page 3.

DIPLOMATIC MANOEUVRES: HOPES AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

During the whole of 1986 and a good part of 1987 the process gathered momentum, and there were many indications that a more constructive dialogue between the two sides was now underway. At the end of 1985 a Soviet expert confided to the journalist, Nayan Chanda, "The Vietnamese would at some time have to seek an accommodation with China. They cannot afford a hostile China on their border in perpetuity."[104]

This same expert suggested a three-stage plan for achieving a settlement in Kampuchea: 1) a meeting of the various Khmer factions, the holding of elections and the formation of a new government; 2) a regional conference to discuss Cambodia; and 3) the convening of a large-scale international conference in which the permanent members of the Security Council and other interested states would take part.

Oddly enough, on 8 January 1986, Kapitsa, the Soviet Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, had proposed an identical plan, adding that the Vietnamese troops might even withdraw in 1987 if this plan were accepted.[105] On 23 January, the Chinese government rejected the Soviet proposal emphasizing that the "key to the question of Kampuchea lay in the withdrawal of all the Vietnamese forces."[106] This response followed China's categorical refusal to sign a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. The next day the communiqué issued at the close of the twelfth meeting of the Indochinese Foreign Ministers' Conference presented a balance sheet which reiterated in eight points their classic position on Kampuchea. It also referred, however, to their desire to revive the negotiations between China and Vietnam without imposing any preliminary conditions, in the hope of restoring normal relations.[107]

On 17 March the Coalition Government of Democratic Kampuchea responded by presenting a peace plan which was also in the form of eight

[104] Nayan Chanda, *Brother Enemy. The War after the War*, *op.cit.*, page 401 and the article by the same author in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 16 January 1986, page 21.

[105] *Le Monde*, 10 January 1986, page 1.

[106] *Ibid.*, 24 January 1986, page 4.

[107] *Documents d'Actualité Internationale*, 15 mars 1986, no. 6, page 109.

points. These included the following provisions: negotiations between the CGDK and Vietnam with a view to having the Vietnamese troops withdraw in two stages; a ceasefire to permit this withdrawal to take place; the creation of a group of UN observers to observe the ceasefire and the withdrawal of the Vietnamese; the setting up, after the first phase of the withdrawal had taken place, of a four-part government which would include the three members of the CGDK and the Heng Samrin faction, with Sihanouk as president and Son Sann as prime minister; general elections under the supervision of UN observers, and a guarantee of Cambodian neutrality with the UN observers remaining in place for three years; the acceptance of foreign aid to promote the reconstruction of the country and its economy; and the signing of a treaty of non-aggression and peaceful co-existence with Vietnam.[108] Despite the fact that this proposal was swiftly rejected by both Vietnam and the Soviet Union it has remained a point of reference in one way or another for the various belligerents.

The process of rapprochement between China and the Soviet Union seemed to pick up speed after Gorbachev's important speech in Vladivostok on 28 July 1986. Meetings between representatives of the two countries became more frequent and both Moscow and Beijing judged it necessary to reaffirm their respective positions so as not to alarm their "allies." The Soviet Union reassured Vietnam about its intentions regarding China, and on the other hand the Secretary General of the Chinese Communist Party confirmed to Prince Sihanouk that Beijing was still in favour of the eight-point plan put forward by the CGDK.[109] It only remained for Igor Rogatchev, when he arrived in Beijing at the beginning of October for the ninth round of the Sino-Soviet negotiations, to declare that Moscow was ready to discuss any question of interest to both sides (in other words Cambodia); this represented a break with the tradition that the Soviets did not discuss matters affecting third parties.[110] Oddly enough it was learnt a little later that there had

[108] *ASEAN Newsletter*, March-April 1986, page 2.

[109] "Hu Yaobang and Sihanouk discuss Cambodia; Relations with Vietnam," *SWB*, 11 September 1986, page A3/2.

[110] Robert C. Horn, "Vietnam and Sino-Soviet Relations. What Price Rapprochement?" *Asian Survey*, vol. XXVII, no. 7, July 1987, page 742.

been skirmishes on the border between China and Vietnam at exactly the time that the Sino-Soviet negotiations were taking place.[111] Should one conclude from this that the Vietnamese were expressing their discontent and reminding others of how attached they were to their independence? Or should these incidents be interpreted as a signal from Beijing to show Moscow that the occupation of Cambodia remained the most serious obstacle to any rapprochement between their two countries?

One can only speculate as to the correct interpretation of the above. What is undeniable, however, is that on 1 October 1986 the Vietnamese Foreign Minister attended the national day reception given by the Chinese Ambassador in Hanoi. A few weeks later the Austrian Ambassador at the UN served as an intermediary for Vietnam, in passing on to Prince Sihanouk a proposal to hold a meeting in Vienna to be attended by the three groups in the CGDK Coalition as well as the representatives of the PRK. Sihanouk responded with a counter proposal calling for a preliminary meeting with a Vietnamese representative.[112]

Since then there have been endless arguments, rumours and vain hopes of success. In all this confusion, much of it intentional, none of the parties has been willing to ask for favours or to risk being accused of weakness by giving ground on even the most minor point of its original demands. Nonetheless, some progress has been made, even if the changes involved are almost imperceptible.

It is clear that the Soviet Union was keen to get the two major opposition groups together at the negotiating table and on 13 March 1987, during the course of a visit to Southeast Asia, the Soviet Foreign Minister, Edward Shevardnadze, took the opportunity to invite Hanoi to restore normal relations with Beijing. At the end of September 1987 the Chinese government also took a significant step forward when its Foreign Minister, Wu Xueqian, said that China had no intention of bringing the Khmer Rouge back to power.[113]

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[111] *Le Monde*, 20 October 1986, page 1.

[112] Nayan Chanda, "Cambodia in 1986, Beginning to Tire," *Asian Survey*, vol. XXVII, no. 1, January 1987, page 123.

[113] *FBIS-EAS*, 2 October 1987, page 18.

In July there was yet another step in the right direction when ASEAN and Vietnam, thanks to efforts of the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Mokhtar Kusumaatmaja, agreed about the possibility of holding an informal meeting of the four Cambodian factions.[114] Finally, on 2 December 1987, Prince Sihanouk, whom the CGDK had released from his duties as president in May, met Hun Sen, the Prime Minister of the PRK, in Paris. At the close of their three-day meeting they announced that they would hold two further meetings, one in France in January 1988 and the other in North Korea at a later date. This announcement led to renewed hopes of progress. These were soon dashed, however, when Sihanouk let it be known that the meetings had been cancelled because the two other Khmer factions were unwilling to take part in any such negotiations. A few days later, Sihanouk changed his mind and announced that he would resume negotiations with Hun Sen.[115]

Scenarios for a Possible Settlement

Since Prince Sihanouk plays a key part in the present situation it is not surprising that he should try to retain an even more important role than the course of events would justify. It seems likely that disappointments, such as the one noted above, are the result of his impatience and his unjustified self-confidence. He obviously wants to force the Khmer Rouge and the KPNLF of Son Sann to follow the path he has blazed; it may be that he also hopes to provoke China to intervene and to persuade the United States to play a more significant role in the conflict. In addition, he would like the Vietnamese leaders to accord him a privileged position as an intermediary and negotiate with him directly.

In the present context it is well to remember the words spoken by the Vietnamese Foreign Minister in 1985 after the proposed Paris meeting between Sihanouk and Hun Sen had been cancelled. Nguyen Co Thach then declared:

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[114] *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 13 August 1987, page 34.

[115] *Globe and Mail*, 11 December 1987 and *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 24 December 1987, page 10.

> I consider this setback to be a manoeuvre on the part of Sihanouk. Sihanouk always deals in contradictions. It was Sihanouk who proposed this meeting — not I, not Hun Sen, not Claude Cheysson [at that time Minister of External Relations]. The meeting was agreed to and then Sihanouk talked to the Chinese about it. He knows that the Chinese and Pol Pot will refuse. So why does he do this? To show them that he has a card to play; then they will make concessions. After that, Sihanouk will negotiate with Hun Sen to get even more concessions. That is the way he operates. It is Sihanouk at his old games.[116]

Is this comment still relevant two years later? Certainly such complicated negotiations require the use of gamesmanship and this is all the more true when Sihanouk is the principal actor. Nonetheless, several things have changed since 1985. Some of the necessary conditions have now been satisfied and this has combined with a more optimistic atmosphere to create expectations for success. If these are not realized there is likely to be a great deal of bitterness towards whoever is held responsible for the failure.

The increased pace of Sino-Soviet rapprochement and the renewal of detente, which has led to hopes of better relations between the United States and the Soviet Union are bound to affect a regional situation which has already changed in a variety of ways. It has been modified by:

- the change in the Vietnamese leaders and in the attitude of the 6th Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party and the priority now given to economic reforms in order to restore and build up the country. The catastrophic state of the Vietnamese economy, its growing dependence on that of the Soviet Union and its need for international capital is now forcing Hanoi — although it is still not a matter of absolute necessity — to show greater flexibility;

- the recognition — as shown in point 2 of the joint communiqué issued by Sihanouk and Hun Sen in December 1987 — that "the Khmer problem" is one which must be

[116] *Le Monde*, 6 April 1985, page 4.

resolved by the Cambodians themselves.[117] This process, which is already underway with the informal "cocktail party" meetings initiated by Indonesia, is acceptable to all those involved in the conflict, whether directly or indirectly, including China.

- the difficulty which those states that wish to keep Vietnam diplomatically and economically isolated have experienced in maintaining a solid front. Disagreements within ASEAN concerning policy towards Vietnam; the beginning of direct trade links by some members of the Association and the increasing presence of Japan (and of Korea) in Vietnam, are some of the factors which threaten the effectiveness of ASEAN's original sanctions. The Association risks being left with only a symbolic unity as expressed in its annual resolution at the United Nations. In short, all parties now have an interest in reaching an honourable solution.

If one eliminates the possibility of a military victory by one side or the other in the foreseeable future there would seem to be two possible outcomes: the first is that the status quo would be maintained until 1990 when the Vietnamese intend to withdraw all their troops; the second is a compromise which would turn Cambodia into a neutral state.

For reasons already given it seems very unlikely that either side can win a decisive victory; despite all its efforts, Vietnam will not succeed in putting an end to the resistance movements by 1990 any more than the latter can overthrow the regime of Heng Samrin by force. As for China, it is inconceivable that in the present circumstances it could launch a military attack on Vietnam in order to force an immediate withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea.

On the other hand it is quite likely that the present situation may continue unchanged until 1990. During the next three years each of the principal antagonists, while preserving its position unchanged, is likely to

[117] *Ibid.*, 5 December 1987, page 36.

adopt a conciliatory tone in order to accuse its opponent of intransigence, and there will probably be a lengthy bargaining process concerning the form of any negotiations. To the extent that each side believes that time is in its favour, this scenario possesses certain advantages. For China and its "allies" in the struggle against Vietnam, the objective will be to persuade the latter to honour its own commitments in 1990. Despite symbolic withdrawals of its troops (or rotations) Hanoi will still be faced at that time with significant resistance and will thus be unable to withdraw. If, however, it then fails to honour its commitments it will lose face and its political credibility will be considerably damaged. By continuing to take no notice of the positive signals which have come from Vietnam, China puts a little more pressure on Vietnam to keep its promises. One of those whom I interviewed in Hanoi put it this way: "We have realized for a long time that the Chinese have set a trap for us by insisting on the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of our forces, but by insisting on this they make it impossible for us to carry it out."[118]

Most of the members of ASEAN, apart from Indonesia and Malaysia, would not be dissatisfied with this scenario, for if the situation goes on Vietnam will become even weaker. As far as the United States is concerned China's unrelenting opposition to Vietnam would allow it to wait for more favorable internal political conditions before resuming a genuine dialogue with the Vietnamese. In addition, Washington sees China's firmness as being the best guarantee of a more gradual rapprochement between Beijing and Moscow.

Despite the political and economic costs involved, this scenario would also have certain advantages for the Vietnamese, since it would enable them to establish themselves more firmly in Cambodia and make the situation there less easily reversible once they had shown that it had been forced upon them by the attitude of the Chinese. A further advantage for the Vietnamese, which would involve a corresponding loss for China and ASEAN, would be the latter's inability to keep the Sihanoukist National Army within the CGDK coalition, since in the long term the Prince might get tired of China supporting the Khmer Rouge. If

[118] The author's interview with a deputy minister in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hanoi, July 1987.

Sihanouk were to definitively quit the CGDK this might well lead to the breakup of that coalition and to increased dissension within ASEAN. Despite his extremely controversial personality all the parties would have to admit that Prince Sihanouk represents the only credible solution for Cambodia because of his presence as a member of the CGDK and his eventual participation in any government reconciling the various Khmer factions. The members of ASEAN, the PRK, and Vietnam are all perfectly well aware of this, and even China itself would find it very difficult to go on supporting the Khmer Rouge.

Finally, this scenario of maintaining the status quo, while it will make Vietnam even more dependent on the Soviet Union, will also increase the Soviet Union's hold over Vietnam. It might also improve relations between the Soviet Union, Indonesia and Malaysia. Indeed, for reasons previously given, the Soviet Union has now a great interest in supporting a settlement in Cambodia, while taking care not to upset its ally, Vietnam. The conflict in Kampuchea is a serious obstacle both to improving its relations with China and to extending its influence throughout Southeast Asia.

The third scenario, namely a concentrated attempt to arrive at a compromise based on Cambodian neutrality, would, therefore, have to be much more satisfactory from the point of view of all those involved. This idea of a neutral Cambodia is neither new or original. It was first raised at the time of the Geneva Agreements in 1954. What is perhaps a new development is that a large number of the states involved are willing to accept the word "neutral" as part of the description of a desirable status for Cambodia, though they do not necessarily agree as to the exact sense in which this word should be used.

As long ago as March 1980, when they met at Kuantan, the heads of state of Indonesia and Malaysia affirmed that establishing a dialogue with Hanoi would free Vietnam from its dependence on the Soviet Union without throwing it into the clutches of Beijing, and that any settlement of the conflict in Cambodia must take into account Vietnam's need to safeguard its own security.[119] This agreement, known as "the Kuantan principle," was controversial at the time, but it has since gained

[119] P. de Beauregard et al., *op.cit.*, page 254.

wider acceptance since the formula for the "Finlandization" of Cambodia seems based on a similar logic.[120] This "Finlandization" as a type of settlement would take account of Vietnam's strategic interests in Cambodia while letting it be ruled by a new government which would be different from both the present regime and the previous one of the Khmer Rouge.

China, which certainly drew up the eight-point proposal put forward by the CGDK, has declared itself in favour of this kind of neutrality for Cambodia and it has maintained at the United Nations that "Kampuchea should become an independent, peaceful, neutral and non-aligned state."[121] The Vietnamese have also recently added the word "neutral" to the adjectives "peaceful, independent and non-aligned." Questioned about this by *Le Monde*, the General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party, Nguyen Van Linh, refused to agree that there had been any change from the earlier position: "I do not think there is any real difference. Perhaps Hun Sen and Sihanouk want to make the matter a little clearer," he said. "In any event, if Cambodia is part of a group in which Sihanouk would occupy an important post it will be the friend of Vietnam."[122] This is a key phrase which echoes what was said to me in various interviews in Vietnam and confirms Vietnam's determination that it will only accept a Cambodia on which it can continue to rely.

Prince Sihanouk seemed to disregard the wishes of Hanoi on this basic point, however, when he spoke of a new Cambodia as being "neither popular, nor democratic, nor communist, nor socialist,"[123] but rather a country with a parliamentary system rather like that of France, which would be multi-party and entirely independent. The future state of Cambodia would get on all the better, in his opinion, if it had good relations with its two big neighbors (Thailand and Vietnam) and with the three superpowers, the Soviet Union, the United States and China.[124]

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[120] See Justus Van der Kroef's studies on this subject and particularly his article "Kampuchea: The Road to Finlandization," *op.cit.*, pages 221-241.

[121] *Beijing Information*, no. 40, 5 October 1987, page 18.

[122] *Le Monde*, 8 December 1987, page 8.

[123] *Le Monde*, 4 December 1987, page 2.

[124] *Ibid.*

The uncertainty which persists concerning the probable status of Cambodia is made up for by the fact that all the proposals for a settlement, including the four-point plan put forward by the UN Secretary General Pérez de Cuellar,[125] agree on the following points:

- the need for national reconciliation between all the opposing groups of Khmers;
- the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops;
- the holding of free elections under foreign supervision;
- the holding of an international conference to guarantee the agreement and the independence of Cambodia.

On the other hand, and this is crucial if any constructive negotiations are to get underway, there is still disagreement concerning the order in which these different procedures should take place. While the CGDK sticks to its eight-point plan which calls for the partial withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops as a first step, to be followed by the formation of a government of national reconciliation, Vietnam, on the other hand, demands that the formation of a quadripartite government must precede any withdrawal of its troops. There is also disagreement concerning the setting up of a quadripartite government since the CGDK wants to make sure that the PRK will not be able to organize and control the elections by welcoming opposition individuals and groups who return — apart from Pol Pot and his close associates — to take part in the process of national reconstruction.[126]

The CGDK responds to that by suggesting that all Cambodians should be reconciled: "No one is rejected regardless of the person's past or political tendency. No one is asked to surrender to anyone. Vietnam proposes a so-called national reconciliation respecting this or that individual in an attempt to split or weaken Cambodian national resistance forces."[127]

[125] *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 16 July 1987, page 12.
[126] *FBIS-EAS* 87-196, 9 October 1987, page 31.
[127] *FBIS-EAS* 87-211, 2 November 1987, page 38.

If the exclusion of Pol Pot and his associates no longer seems to be an insurmountable difficulty there is still, nonetheless, considerable suspicion concerning the tolerance which will be required for this process of "national reconciliation." Even more serious is the refusal of the Khmers to disarm once they are allowed back into Cambodia. Kieu Samphan declared that on this point "Vietnam is trying to achieve by diplomatic means what it failed to obtain by military means: to disarm the main land force in the area which is opposed to it. We don't want to fall into that trap."[128]

There are still many other difficulties since it is hard to imagine how one would set up even a provisional government composed of four factions. When this quadripartite coalition was first proposed, Hanoi, in fact, ridiculed it by pointing out that those who had nothing to offer wanted to give Heng Samrin "a quarter of the cake."[129] It is true, however, that this comment was made in the spring of 1986.

Finally, one cannot ignore a still more serious source of concern, which would persist even if an agreement is reached concerning the holding of "free elections." This concern has been expressed by various sources[130] and was summed up by Prince Sihanouk when he said:

> . . . the Vietnamese leaders can well afford the luxury of saying that they will leave Cambodia in 1990. By then they will have achieved a two-fold success: first of all, the number of Vietnamese colonists will have reached a million — a million people who will have acquired Cambodian nationality and the right to vote; second, the so-called army of the 'People's Republic of Cambodia' under the authority of Heng Samrin will have become a second Vietnamese army.[131]

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[128] Interview with Khieu Samphan "Cambodge : l'Union sacrée?" *Politique internationale*, no. 34, Winter 1986-1987, page 333.

[129] Nayan Chanda, "Cambodia in 1986," *op.cit.*, page 122.

[130] See especially the article by Al Santoli "Endless Insurgency: Cambodia," *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 8, no. 2, Spring 1985, pages 61-73.

[131] Interview with Norodom Sihanouk "Libérer le Cambodge," in *Politique internationale*, no. 31, Spring 1986, page 257.

CANADA CAUGHT BETWEEN HELPLESSNESS AND INVOLVEMENT

One of the many paradoxes in recent international history is undoubtedly the way in which the conflicts in Indochina seem to have become commonplace. From the end of the Second World War right up to the signing of the Paris Accords in 1973, the West took action and spent money in order to defend that area as if the future of the whole of Asia, if not of the free world, depended on its determination to hold the two most troublesome forms of Communism — those of the China and Vietnam — in check.

Given recent history, perhaps the strangest aspect of the current complicated situation in Vietnam is the absence of the United States and its lack of interest in what is going on. The trauma of Vietnam still lingers on in Washington and Hanoi is not yet ready to let bygones be bygones as it has with France. It is interesting, however, that several Vietnamese leaders continue to maintain that the United States has an obligation to defend the security of Asia. Many things would perhaps never have happened — or so say the Vietnamese — if the United States had not let China take over responsibility for defending the region.[132]

Several prominent Vietnamese agree, albeit with an air of resignation, that it is hard to have any illusions about improving the relationship between the two countries during what remains of the Reagan administration.[133] The Vietnamese leaders declared themselves ready to resume normal relations with Washington but pointed out that in their

[132] Interview with Pham Binh, Director of the Institute of International Relations, Hanoi.

[133] The author's interviews in Hanoi.

opinion the Americans were not now "indispensable in the pursuit of a settlement."[134] It certainly remains true, however, despite official pride and determination, that US economic cooperation would be greatly appreciated in the current effort to restore Vietnam.

This brief account of how Vietnam views the United States is by no means irrelevant here since it relates to the fact that many Vietnamese to whom I spoke thought any discussion of Canada must be prefaced by a reference to US policy. As far as Vietnam is concerned, Canada is virtually assimilated with the United States; certainly the distinction between the two countries becomes self-evident when one refers to their respective roles in the recent history of Indochina but there is a strong tendency to associate the policies followed by Ottawa with those of Washington since 1978-1979. In general, Canada's policy is either misunderstood or ignored; mention of it in several interviews was greeted with skepticism, perplexity or even derision and a failure to understand why Canada, which has no direct interest in the conflict, should be as intransigent in its relations with Vietnam as is the United States. Those to whom I spoke, regularly referred to the policies pursued by Australia, Sweden, the Netherlands and France, and pointed out that it was possible to maintain relations with a country without necessarily agreeing with it politically.

Despite the fact that Ottawa maintains diplomatic relations with Hanoi, the contacts between the two countries amount to very little. The Vietnamese Ambassador in London is accredited to Ottawa and the Canadian Ambassador in Bangkok is accredited to Hanoi. Occasional meetings give symbolic legitimacy to this diplomatic recognition. As was shown in the first section of this study, since 1979 Canada has been a loyal supporter of the large coalition which has excluded Vietnam from the international community ever since Vietnamese troops invaded Kampuchea. To use the words of Kim Nossal: "Canada's persistent policy of punishing Vietnam — a policy which has been in effect for eight years — is easier to understand if one regards the sanctions against

[134] Interview with Nguyen Co Thach, "L'Indochine neutralisée," in *Politique internationale*, no. 31, Spring 1986, page 237.

Vietnam as being designed to prove, symbolically as much as anything else, that Canada supports a coalition of other states."[135]

The exceptional welcome which Canadians gave the "boat people," whose plight happened to occur at a time when human rights had a high profile in international affairs, has had a marked effect on Canadian policy. At the time, Flora MacDonald, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, departed from the usual low-key Canadian style of intervention when she took a strong stand at the United Nations Geneva Conference on Refugees, which the Secretary General convoked on 20 July 1979. Despite Kurt Waldheim's efforts to ensure that participants would confine their remarks to the humanitarian aspects of the problem, the Minister accused Vietnam several times of being largely responsible for "this flagrant, this continuing, this outrageous violation of human rights."[136] No other Western delegate made a speech which criticized Vietnam so strongly.[137] On her return MacDonald told a press conference that she had met the Vietnamese Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Phan Hien, in Geneva and that she had emphasized to him that Canada had reached the end of its patience as far as this affair was concerned.[138]

During the whole of 1979, Ottawa not only emphasized the humanitarian aspect of what was going on in Indochina but it also took some political initiatives. A few months before, the Canadian representative to the Security Council had declared that "The peoples and governments of Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos must be given *more sympathy than remonstrance.*[139] They must be helped to develop the political framework within which they will be able to live in peace and security."[140]

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[135] Kim Nossal, "Les sanctions économiques et les petits Etats: le cas de la "punition" du Vietnam par le Canada," *Etudes internationales*, vol. XVIII, no. 3. September 1987, page 541.

[136] Flora MacDonald, "Crisis in Southeast Asia: Humanitarian and Political Aspects Can't Be Separated," *Statements and Speeches*, Ottawa, no. 79/12, Geneva, 20 July 1979, page 2.

[137] *International Canada*, July-August 1979, page 185.

[138] *La Presse*, 23 July 1979.

[139] Author's emphasis.

[140] W.H. Barton, "Canada reminds the Security Council of its Southeast Asian Responsibilities," *Statements and Speeches*, Ottawa, no. 79/1, New York, 24 February 1979, page 2.

In a news release on 19 October 1979, the Department of External Affairs stated that:

> An exclusively humanitarian response to the present situation in Kampuchea — compelling though the requirements for it may be — is not enough. There must be a political approach to dealing with the roots of the problem, that is the policies being pursued by the Government of Vietnam.
>
> To restore the independence of Kampuchea, hostilities will have to be brought to an end and the foreign forces now occupying much of the country will have to be withdrawn. The Ministers stressed that Canada would support any effort to start the process of political settlement through negotiations among the interested parties.[141]

Later events showed, in fact, that Canada was content to support the efforts made by others, while maintaining at the United Nations that it was "imperative that some satisfactory proposal be developed and accepted to allow the interested parties to come to the negotiating table."[142] The Secretary of State for External Affairs was pleased to learn that the matter would soon be debated in the General Assembly and pointed out that: "Unless it succeeds I can foresee nothing but continuing conflict, suffering, instability and tragedy for that part of the world."[143]

This was a fair analysis of the situation. Since then, however, Canadian governments have been content to provide passive support and to hide behind their recognition of a coalition composed of several parties, all of which are anti-Vietnamese but each of which pursues quite different interests, almost none of which have any relevance for Canada. This raises several questions. Does Canada have anything to gain by changing the policies which it has followed consistently since 1979? What sorts of assets does Canada have for playing the helpful role which no one has really asked of it, but which one might have expected it to take on? Above all, in what way can Canada contribute to bringing about a settlement of the conflict in Indochina?

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[141] Department of External Affairs, *Communiqué*, Ottawa, no. 78, 19 October 1979, page 2.

[142] Canadian Delegation to the United Nations, *Communiqué*, Ottawa, no. 12, 5 November 1979, page 3.

[143] *Ibid.*

One of Canada's main advantages is its experience in Indochina. In a 1982 speech prepared for the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Mark MacGuigan and delivered, in his absence, by Tom Delworth, it was recalled that:

> While the Canadian participation in the International Control Commissions did not bring peace to Indochina, we persisted for almost 20 years in these efforts because we believed that we had a contribution to make in upholding a painfully achieved peace and in advancing the cause of stability in the political turmoil of the region at the time. One long-range result of this Canadian presence in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos was the sense of involvement of a whole generation of foreign service officers to Southeast Asia. At one point, as many as 30 per cent of the whole External Affairs officers corps had served in Indochina. The experience acquired in Southeast Asia by External Affairs subsequently very much kindled Canadian interest in that part of the world.[144]

The generosity with which Canada welcomed the "boat people," the money devoted to that cause, the display of public support for the refugees and the arrival of over a hundred thousand Indochinese in Canada, have undoubtedly contributed to giving the Canadian government a high degree of credibility as far as Indochina is concerned. Nor must one forget the bilateral programme for family reunification which has enabled twenty-five thousand Vietnamese to come to Canada since 1979. If one takes into account these two Canadian experiences of Indochina, as well as Canada's traditional belief in negotiation, mediation and peacekeeping and its constant efforts to bring about peaceful settlements both bilaterally and multilaterally, it seems clear that Ottawa is endowed with a tradition and an expertise which it is no longer making available to the belligerents in Indochina.

To the extent that Canada has now begun to take an obvious interest in Asia and the Pacific and often accords priority to that part of the world in its foreign policy statements, it would seem desirable that Canada's interest in the area not be expressed purely in economic terms but also by

[144] Mark MacGuigan, "Growing Canada-ASEAN Relations," *Statements and Speeches*, no. 82/19, pages 1-2.

its wish to contribute to the defence and political stability of the region. As far as security is concerned, Canada does not seem to have moved from its traditional position. In a recent, quite extensive analysis of Canadian policy in the Pacific, the Assistant Deputy Minister for External Affairs, Jean McCloskey, devoted only a few lines to this subject, saying that: "The White Paper on Defence, recognizing the extent of Canadian economic interests in Asia, suggested that the strategic significance of the Northeast Pacific underlines the need for a more effective Canadian naval force on the West coast."[145]

On the other hand, the present government, like its predecessors, cannot remain indifferent to a permanent lack of balance in the area which makes it difficult for Canada to maintain straightforward and open relations with the countries of the region as it would like to do. Canada has traditionally supported an international order based on coexistence and harmony between conflicting interests. As a middle power, Canada has always been suspicious of regional conflicts which the great — or almost great — powers appear to be manipulating to serve their own purposes. The current stability in Indochina, therefore, ought not to exclude, a priori, positive intervention by Canada in an effort to end a conflict in which small and middle-ranking powers are serving as surrogates.

Finally, even if Canadian policy in Southeast Asia is more concerned with consolidating its economic gains and acquiring new markets, it would be unwise to underestimate the long-term development potential of the Indochinese peninsula. Canada's advantages, its experience and its good will would all justify it showing greater awareness of the situation in Indochina and playing a more active role there.

While Canada has not really re-evaluated the policy which it adopted in 1979, it seems to have been excessively zealous in acting with the same sort of intransigence which was shown by China in the fifties and sixties.

[145] Mme Jean C. McCloskey, "New Realities in the Pacific: The Political Perspective." Conference organised by the Canadian Institute of International Affairs, Ottawa, 26 March 1988.

It persists in its belief that by preserving a show of solidarity with the other members of the coalition opposed to the Vietnamese presence in Kampuchea, it will help to weaken Vietnam and bring about a solution to the problem; in the meantime it reaps the benefits of this policy with its friends in ASEAN, and with China and the United States.

It is worth noting, however, that Canada's policy has not had the impact which was hoped for because it has played a very passive role in support of its allies; in addition, there is no reason to suppose that Canada would lose anything in its relations with China, the United States or the ASEAN countries, if it were to adopt a more substantive and independent approach to Vietnam and Kampuchea. It is worth remembering that some of the Asian countries which are most opposed to Communism have embarked on commercial relations with Vietnam; Japan was the first non-communist state to trade with Vietnam and it has been followed by Singapore which is one of the coalition states most vigorously opposed to Vietnam. It is also significant that South Korea and even Thailand, despite the fact that the latter is involved in clashes with Vietnamese troops on the Cambodian border, have begun to trade indirectly with Hanoi. Why should Canada be more rigid in its approach than some of the Asian countries most strongly opposed to Communism?

One should not contemplate any radical change in Canadian policy to Vietnam, however, without considering the risks this might involve. First of all, it is important to avoid having any positive action interpreted by Hanoi as a sign of weakness on the part of the coalition opposed to it, since this would encourage the acceptance of the situation in Kampuchea as permanent; in the second place Canada should try to avoid the errors involved in previous interventions, particularly in the case of Australia, by making it crystal clear to its "allies" (ASEAN, China, and the United States) exactly what is intended.

Thus any appropriate Canadian policy *vis-à-vis* Vietnam should make it quite clear that Canada continues to attach importance to the security and stability of Southeast Asia. Ottawa could, for example, go beyond the mere expression of good intentions by showing unambiguously that it is willing to contribute, if only symbolically, to protecting the security of

Thailand were the latter to be gravely threatened. An independent Canadian policy could equally well reaffirm its unalterable opposition to the continued presence of Vietnamese troops in Kampuchea, while nonetheless resuming a variety of activities with Vietnam, under certain conditions.

Having made its position clear Canada could:

- authorize funding to certain Canadian non-governmental organizations concerned with humanitarian relief and encourage them to gradually resume their activities in Vietnam, and even some activities in Kampuchea, without implying recognition of the regime in Phnom Penh;

- encourage and facilitate exploratory steps on the part of Canadian firms which would like to make contact with Vietnam, lest they be deprived of potential markets if the political situation changes in the not too distant future;

- encourage the resumption of educational and cultural contacts by cooperating with those Canadian provinces interested in arranging exchange programmes with Indochina;

- cooperate with Indonesia, one of Canada's most important allies in ASEAN, to discover Vietnamese intentions and pass on to Hanoi the significance and extent of any changes in Canadian policy;

- make it clear that Canada supports Prince Sihanouk's current efforts to find an acceptable solution to the problem in Cambodia by initiating a dialogue among the various Khmer factions; and indicate that Canada is willing to join other countries in guaranteeing a "genuine" neutrality for Cambodia once the Vietnamese troops have left;

- make it known that Canada would be willing to help supervise general elections in Kampuchea either under UN or other auspices;

- treat Vietnam as a full member of La Francophonie and use that organization to the fullest extent possible as a means of resuming regular contacts with Vietnam.

This is a most important point since the fact that the two countries have use of the French language in common should be a great advantage and should make any improvement in relations easy to justify to Canada's allies. This approach would be all the easier and more acceptable since it would probably be initiated by Quebec and need not therefore weaken Ottawa's position *vis-à-vis* its allies. The contacts which were made in Quebec, at the Francophone Summit of September 1987, between the representatives of Ottawa and Quebec and those of Vietnam, could serve as a starting point for various initivatives of this kind. The possibility of increased contacts has been frequently mentioned in the course of several meetings in Hanoi between the author and Vietnamese representatives. The fact that the Vietnamese authorities are interested in increased contacts has been shown by the detailed consideration given to exchange programmes and to the nature of the delegations which could be exchanged without doing damage to Canada's official position regarding Vietnam. Any initiative of this kind should come from Quebec, and should take place in the framework of La Francophonie which will clarify the scope and limits of the proposed exchanges. Agreements could quickly be put in place covering different subjects such as the teaching of French, health, medicine, and scientific training for Vietnamese students in Quebec universities, and these arrangements could easily be cancelled if it turned out that such positive gestures were being exploited for political purposes.

By taking such positive initiatives while continuing to remain firm in its approach to Vietnam, Canada would make it abundantly clear that it attaches great importance to Southeast Asia. Its policy would be seen as less passive and less an echo of that of Washington, and it would be assured of a more desirable role in any wider negotiations. By proclaiming its intentions in this way, Canadian policy would be less dependent on the turn of events in Indochina. Canada would also avoid being relegated to a position where it always appears to be reacting and adjusting to the policies of others.

CONCLUSION

Ever since the Second World War the conflicts in the Indochinese peninsula have been part of the wider dissensions and antagonisms within the international system. In their regional aspect these conflicts show how ancestral enmities and cultural differences persist and are made worse by being subsumed under new political ideologies. The antagonisms in Indochina are therefore structurally more like those in the Middle East than like the regional troubles in Africa or Central America.

Because of the current climate of international affairs, Indochina has benefitted, as have other areas of conflict, from a lowering of tension and a spurt of optimism. From Nicaragua to Afghanistan, even in Angola, there have been amazingly successful attempts at mutual understanding as a result of the improved relations between Moscow and Washington. This has injected new hope into the situation in Indochina. Nonetheless, the number of actors involved in this conflict and its deep roots in historical antagonisms make it unlikely that there will be any swift solution to the problem.

The present situation is conducive to understanding, concessions and negotiations, but the interests of the various conflicting parties remain the same. To restore Cambodian society, which has been torn apart by fratricidal strife, or to reassure the refugees and persuade them to return to their own countries, presents a challenge which seems almost insurmountable despite the good intentions of Norodom Sihanouk or of the leaders in Phnom Penh. How can one imagine, despite the pressure from Moscow and the improvement in Sino-Soviet relations, that

Vietnam can loosen its ties with Cambodia and Laos which it considers as a part of the buffer zone required to ensure its security? How can one believe that China and its allies in ASEAN will be easily satisfied with whatever promises or assurances they receive from Hanoi?

The difficulty of answering these questions should not, however, necessarily be a cause for despair. Wider negotiations may lead to agreement on certain points. It might well be possible, for instance, to agree to guarantee the survival of Cambodia as a neutral or non-aligned country. In order to achieve this objective, which is absolutely basic to any settlement, the Western countries will have to adjust their policies in the light of current events. Canada could easily combine both firmness and flexibility by adopting a policy towards Indochina which is more in line with its traditional foreign policy, a policy concerned with making a positive contribution to peace rather than maintaining sanctions which are not in its own immediate interests.

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GÉRARD HERVOUET

Gérard Hervouet is a professor of Political Science at Laval University and is also the editor of *Études Internationales*, the journal published by the Quebec Centre for International Relations.

He has visited China, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, South Korea and Vietnam in his capacity as a professor and as a guest lecturer.

He was formerly the Secretary-Treasurer of the Canadian Association for Asian Studies and is at present a member of the Canadian Committee for Economic Co-operation with the Pacific.

Canadian Institute for International
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360 Albert Street, Suite 900
Ottawa, Ontario K1R 7X7